THE KESHO MARRIAGE

SIR EDMUND GOSSE

527

THE EXPLOITS OF KESHO NAIK, DACOIT

By the Same Author

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THE EXPLOITS OF KESHO NAIK, DACOIT

By

Sir Edmund C. Cox, Bart.

Author of "The Achievements of John Carruthers," etc.

London

Constable & Company Ltd.

1912

To

WALTER FREWEN LORD

In celebration of thirty years'
unbroken friendship

PREFACE

Krishna, the narrator of these stories, was a Police constable who appeared first in my book "John Carruthers, Indian Policeman." In my book "The Achievements of John Carruthers," which I dedicated to Krishna, this faithful officer again came upon the scene, doing much useful work as a detective; and one of the stories, "The Railway Police," was written by him. I have represented Krishna as relating the history of Kesho Naik, the audacious dacoit, in exactly the terms that a native of India would employ when describing events in his own language. I might say that I thought out these stories in Hindustani and Mahratti; and I have endeavoured to give them an English rendering which is as nearly as possible identical with Krishna's mode of expressing himself.

The first of these stories is founded on fact. The escape from prison described in the last chapter is exactly what happened a few years ago.

Shiwaji, the famous Mahratta patriot, who has been several times referred to in these pages, rebelled against the Mahometan rulers of India in the seventeenth century, and established a Hindoo dynasty in Western India. He was crowned as Rajah on the fort of Raiguhr in 1674. The coronation was witnessed by Mr. Henry Oxenden of the East India Company.

E. C. C.

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The Exploits of Kesho Naik, Dacoit

CHAPTER I

THE FOOLISHNESS OF TRENCH SAHIB

Many years have gone by since it pleased Trench Sahib to put upon this humble one the task of writing somewhat concerning Jan Carruthers Sahib. But I call to mind that in the carrying out of that order there came to me, Krishna, much heaviness; for how could a poor man who is gifted with little learning or knowledge accomplish that in which a possessor of much wisdom might hardly succeed? Yet though my head went round and my fingers ached before I had come to the end of that burden, who can say that it was not an auspicious day on which I took the ink and the pen and entered upon my destiny? For Trench Sahib said that the Sahib who had the

chap-khana in London was satisfied, and he was to print what I had written in a book for the Sahib-logue to read. Jan Carruthers himself gave me shahbash, and this foolish one seemed to have become something. But when it was said to me that what was done once might be done a second time, as well, not to say better, and that I should write some further history, this did not commend itself to me ; for how could I forget the fable of the frog who would become as large as the ox, and who puffed himself out to such proportions that his body burst ? If I had pleased the Sahibs once why should I undo that which had been done, and throw away the reputation which had come to me by again undergoing risks with the ink and the paper, and it may be exposing my witlessness. So this slave requested that he should be excused ; and after much talk and argument the Huzoor was pleased to accept his petition. But now, as I have said, many years have gone by, and what was of consideration in former days has at the last another value, whether less or greater ; nor is there the mind of any man that does not suffer change. And it has come to

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me that inasmuch as I did not accede to the word of the Sahibs, herein I was guilty. And lest the reproach should continue I will once more put my hand to the writing down of circumstances.

And truly what is now to be said might not have been written at the time without the causing of uneasiness. But the days have come and have gone; and Trench Sahib has achieved many things; nor can it be placed to his discredit that upon a time he had not attained experience. For what man is there, however great be his station, who was not once a helpless child?

It was on the conclusion of the great famine, and the storm that had arisen was not wholly subdued. For though the latter rains had fallen, and the fields might again be ploughed and furrowed and sown with millet, yet many jawans had taken pleasure in the life to which the famine had driven them. Dacoity and robbery had gone into their soul. To loot a bunya and to plunder a sowkar seemed a better means of filling the belly than to drive the bullocks that were yoked to the ploughshare. Before the time of the British Raj a man of spirit might carve out for himself a kingdom;

but such doings were not pleasing to the English Sahibs who had taken all the kingdoms ; and if the most that a man could do was to lead a band of dacoits, who can blame him if that was his fate ? Unto every man is his own destiny ; and it was mine that I should in some degree help the English in bringing to justice such as were foolish enough to break the laws that they had made.

Well, there were many gangs of dacoits who kept the country-side on fire ; and the Police had much trouble, for there was marching hither and marching thither for days and weeks and months, and where after great effort they captured two or three Feraris (outlaws), others instantly sprang up in their place. And of all the leaders the most famous was Kesho Naik. Kesho was a Koli by caste, a Mahadew Koli of the hills and the jungle, not of those who live beside the sea. He gathered together Kolis and Ramoshis and Mhars, and even Mahrattas ; and he and his band were like the wind, for who could say whence they came and whither they went ? And Kesho's name became great ; and men were saying that he was the scourge of the Deccan. But not so all ; for what

Kesho robbed from the rich he distributed in great part to the poor ; and no one would give true khubber regarding him to the Police who were sent to catch him. Kesho was at that time a fine active jawan of it may be twenty-eight or thirty years. In height he was somewhat less than more ; but his muscles were strong as the wings of an eagle. He would ride sixty miles or walk thirty miles without thought of weariness. For a hill Koli his complexion was fair, and his features were goodly to look upon. It was said that even in the fastnesses of the Ghauts Kesho was careful to wear clothing of rich fabric. Round his neck he wore a silver chain to which was attached a small golden case that might be an amulet or charm. That he knew no fear was understood by all. But his heart was black. His nature was of craft and deceit ; and who would say that he possessed any mercy ? This was the man whom it was expected that Trench Sahib should bring before the Sirkar, whether alive or dead.

And in truth the Sahib made very great efforts to accomplish what it was set upon him to do. If his wisdom was not yet ripe, and he was deceived

by false tales that Kesho was here when he was there, and there when he was indeed many kos away, I, Krishna, have seen with my eyes how he regarded not his comfort, and thought not of food or drink or bed, but whether on foot or on his pony he would travel for miles and miles as often as he heard news of Kesho. But all this labour was barren of fruit. The Sahib was becoming pale and thin; and Kesho laughed, and sent a word that the Sahib should catch him when the tortoise should catch the hare. But Trench Sahib said whoso laughs last hi is the longest laughter.

Now it was the month of Magh (January) and the days were cold, and the Sahib gave the order that there should be two days' halt at Pimpri for the Police to rest and regain strength after so much marching. A small tent was pitched for the Sahib, and we humble ones slept and took our meals in the dhuramshala (rest-house). And this arrangement was good, for since many days all had slept on the ground and eaten when and where we could. And in the afternoon the Sahib was sitting in his tent and was drinking tea; and this humble one was cleaning his Sahib's sword

and his rifle and his guns behind the tent. Much cleaning was required, for all the weapons were covered with rust and dirt. No servant or orderly was in attendance. I alone was present. I heard the Sahib strike a match for the lighting of his cigarette, and then he called out, "Kon hai? who is that?" I remained silent, for I reflected that I had done nothing to disturb the presence, and that some other one must have come near. But I stooped low and glanced round the corner of the tent, and I saw a man approaching. It was a Mahometan, and it would seem a poor man, for his clothes were old and stained and his puggri was dishevelled. His age may have been fifty or more, for his short beard was streaked with grey. And I busied myself with cleaning the sword and the guns behind the tent; but how could I not hear somewhat of the words that passed when the Sahib called the stranger into his tent? And when I perceived that the talk was of Kesho Naik, it did not seem to me right that I should close the ears of prudence; so if I heard not all that passed, yet the sum and the substance were not shut out from under-

standing. The aged Mahometan was weeping and saying that Kesho had robbed him, and that he could tell the Sahib where Kesho lay, and how the Sahib might secure him. And the Sahib made reply that many lies had been told him already, and how could he know where there was truth ? But the Mahometan persisted, and said that Kesho was enamoured of Tara the daughter of Raoji the patel of Athni, only a kos and a half away, and at this very time he may be found in Raoji's house. The Sahib should come along with a gun and handcuffs, and he should capture this Shaitan ; but he should bring no Police lest suspicion should be excited. This then was agreed upon. The Mahometan, whose name was Fakir-ud-din, was to wait three hundred paces off beneath the great peepul tree, where the Sahib should presently join him. So Fakir-ud-din left the presence ; and I heard the chink of handcuffs as the Sahib put into his pocket those which lay upon the table. Then he called for me, Krishna, and I stood before the huzoor, and saluted. He bade me load his double-barrelled shot-gun with cartridges of number four shot,

and give him a dozen spare ones, as he had heard of some duck in a neighbouring tank. And I obeyed ; and I took courage to ask if I should accompany him. But he did not consent, and he walked away alone with the gun and the cartridges.

Now if this humble one be asked the why and the wherefore, let it be understood that it is not for him to reply. There are reasons and there are arguments ; but there may come a time when a thought is better than a lakh of reasons. And a thought had come to me, Krishna. I stood at attention in the front of the tent while the Sahib marched to the peepul tree and thence proceeded with Fakir-ud-din along the track that leads through deep nullahs and dense jungles, up hill and down dale to Athni. Now of what was to transpire I had not full perception ; but this thought came to me that I must follow the Sahib ; and some other things too there were which I arranged in haste. The sun was now becoming low, and there were deep shadows in the jungle, and I could creep through the bushes on one side of the rough track without being seen. And I came on a level with the Sahib and Fakir-ud-din ;

and I perceived that they were conversing, though only a few words reached me. But I observed that from time to time Fakir-ud-din would look backwards. And it so happened that once when he was looking back my foot caught in the root of a tree and I tripped; and by reason of this mistake there was a rustling of the thicket. Then Fakir-ud-din stood still, and looked and looked; and the Sahib stood still also. So I learnt that my mistake was a heavy one. But I knew something of the ways of the jungle; and before one could say "Shiv! Shiv!" I raised the cry of a jackal. And owing to my good fortune my cry was answered by a pack of jackals. So the doubt in the mind of Fakir-ud-din was satisfied; and the two continued their walk. But I let them go the distance of a shout before I rose. And then again a thought came to me. I, Krishna, am not so skilled in the following and deciphering of footprints as are the Bhils; but something I have learnt of the art. Now where the Sahib and his guide had passed, the ground was soft, and the tracks must be clear. So I went and examined them. And what I

saw filled me with wonder. For the Mahometan, as I have written, was old; but the tracks that were beside the Sahib's were those of a young man. Then I understood that in truth there was great treachery. And I hastened after the Sahib.

This track that led to Athni was, it must be said, rather that of goats than of men, and there was much labour in climbing over rocks. It may be a kos from Pimpri that the way lay through a deep and narrow nullah. On each side was dense jungle. Of a sudden the path seemed, as it might be said, to come to an end altogether before a precipitous rock that was in height not less than six cubits, or, as the Sahibs would say, nine feet. From the bushes I could see the Sahib and his companion; and I was near enough to hear their words. And Trench Sahib said, "How shall we surmount this obstacle?" Fakir-ud-din made reply, "See, I will show the Sahib," and by laying hold of jungle roots and placing his feet on ledges in the face of the rock which were so small that they could hardly be perceived, in a few moments he was on the top.

"Now," he said, "where the old man leads cannot the young man follow? But the Sahib should hand me his gun, and then he can climb with greater ease." Then it was in my mind to call out to the Sahib not to do this thing; and yet again I thought, why should I say a word, for surely he will not listen to this foolishness? Be this as it may, my speech became silence. And the Sahib held up his gun by the barrel and the Mahometan took it.

Then a strange thing happened, but yet to this slave not altogether unexpected. For it was not now an old man who stood above the Sahib, nor was it a Mahometan, for his beard lay upon the ground, but a fine stalwart jawan.

And the jawan made salaam, as it might be humbly, to the Sahib, and he said,

"Has the Sahib any commands for Kesho Naik, seeing that Kesho is here present?"

And Kesho pointed the gun at the Sahib.

Then this foolish one's liver became water. What was it that should be done? I was fearing for the Sahib, and I turned it in my mind whether I should do that which in truth might be done,

for something I had brought with me from the tent.

In my brain was much confusion, for I was fearing most of all that the Sahib would be angered if I put my hand into this business. And it was my fate that I refrained; and I waited to see what word would be said.

Now if Kesho knew not fear, so neither did Trench Sahib, though he might not have wisdom. And he said "Goddam," and made as though he would climb the rock as Kesho had climbed it. And Kesho said:

"Stand still, Sahib, or I fire!"

Then Trench Sahib said in English, "Fire and be damned," and he was climbing the rock.

Kesho said, "Shahbash! Yih Asal Sahib hai, this is a real Sahib!"

Then the root which the Sahib was holding broke away, and he slipped back, and he was standing on the ground.

Kesho laughed and said, "See, this is my lucky day. The Sahib is in my power. Now will I shoot this Sahib who would take Kesho living or

dead before the Sirkar." And he was aiming the gun at the Sahib.

The Sahib said, " Tumhari khushi, just as you will," and again he began to climb the rock, and again it was his fate that he should slip back.

Kesho said, " This is a man. The Sahib should join with me, and he will eat more rupees than he receives from the Sirkar."

Then the Sahib was angered and he threatened, and swore that some day he would be revenged.

" I care not for some day," said Kesho. " To-day is to-day, and for some other day who knows what is written ? But this day I have had my pleasure. I have seen a man. And this bargain shall be between us twain, the Sahib and Kesho. I will give the Sahib back his gun and he may go in peace. But for these things he shall give me his word. He shall not fire his gun, and he shall not move from this spot for the space of an hour, after which he shall return to his camp. If consent be not now accorded, I will shoot."

For a minute, it may be, or more, the Sahib kept silence. At last he said, " Very well, Kesho, I give you my word."

Then Kesho held the gun by the barrel and lowered it down till the Sahib held the stock in his hand. And Kesho stood at the top of the rock, facing the Sahib.

When I saw this there came to me, Krishna, great joy. Now, I thought, the Sahib will shoot, and do justice on this dog of a dacoit. For who should be required to keep faith with such as he? Now shall we Police have leisure from this marching and marching.

But the Sahib set down the gun, and he looked at his watch, and he lit a cigarette.

"Has the Sahib pleasure in life?" asked Kesho, while he looked with eyes of admiration at my Sahib.

"Truly my destiny is good," said the Sahib; "and I have great pleasure in many things. In the shooting of wild beasts and even flying birds there is pleasure; and still more so in bringing to justice those who break the law of the Sirkar. But no pleasure shall equal that which I shall receive when I arrest or shoot Kesho Naik."

Kesho laughed. "Some day it may be my

destiny that the Sahib shall take me; but it is not his destiny that he shall keep me for long. And for the shooting, what is there to prevent the Sahib from shooting me now?"

The Sahib blew from his mouth a cloud of cigarette smoke; and he laughed.

"Only this," he said, "that it is not my pleasure. What more should be required for a reason?"

"More may not be required," said Kesho; "but still there is more. It is the word of an English Sahib which may not be broken. To me this is foolishness. Were I the Sahib, and the Sahib, Kesho, should I not shoot?"

"No," replied Trench Sahib, "you would not shoot. But the foolishness is in what you have been doing. In the book of the Christians it is written that the way of the transgressors is hard. Know you not that the arm of the Sirkar is long, and that some day there will be an ending of this rebellion?"

"In this contest," answered Kesho, "have there not been losses on both sides? Do not victories depend upon the hand of God?"

"He who follows war will find cause to repent," said Trench Sahib.

"Doubtless the Sahib speaks from experience," said Kesho. For this evil one was ever ready with an answer. "What will the Sahib do for me if I surrender to him? Will he give me high nokri (service) in the Police?"

"I should take you before the nearest magistrate," said the Sahib; "you would be committed to the sessions, and there would be an order for hanging."

Kesho laughed. "The bait is not tempting," he said. "If the Sirkar will give pardon to me and my men, and hold out promise of lands and fat appointments, the offer may be considered. Yet in my life is there not more pleasure? Is it always good that in the beginning of a day the end should be known? But the hour is becoming late, and this slave must depart. The conversation between this slave and the exalted one has been profitable. This is my hope that there may again be an agreeable meeting."

"I too hope for a meeting," Trench Sahib said.

Kesho made salaam, and turned round, and walked slowly away. And I looked that the Sahib would now shoot, but he sat down and lit another cigarette.

Then I took courage, and I stood before the Sahib and said, "Sahib, it is I, Krishna. I have brought the revolver and cartridges from the tent, and there is the gun; and we may go after this evil one."

The Sahib stood up and he was filled with rage. And he said:

"How long have you been here? What have you heard?"

And I requested that I had heard all.

"Heard all, you be-iman, faithless one!" he exclaimed. "Heard my promise to refrain from firing, after Kesho gave me back my life, and you want me to break my word!"

"This humble one may be pardoned," I said, "but what is there due to this dacoit and murderer who keeps faith with no man, and who will again commit dacoity and murders if we do not pursue him?"

I may not write down what terrible words

were said to this slave. It had seemed to this humble one that the Sirkar had sent the Sahib to arrest this Shaitan, and that when he had been delivered into his hand he should not be allowed to go free. And my heart was heavy within me. But there is no understanding the ways of the Sahibs; and their why and their wherefore are not to be comprehended. It is for us humble ones to obey.

This is what I was set to write; and if I have offended my presumption may receive pardon.

CHAPTER II

THE CAPTURE OF KESHO NAIK, AND THE AUDACITY OF HIS ESCAPE

That a poor man such as I am should do aught to displease the Sahibs were in every respect unbecoming. For to incur their displeasure is a heavy thing, and in the avoidance thereof much carefulness is to be observed. But what shall be acceptable and what shall be considered a fault, who shall say? I have seen many Sahibs, and to me, Krishna, they have done much kindness; nevertheless that they are quick to anger may not be gainsaid. Now in the matter of writing down the history of Trench Sahib's foolishness in that he did not shoot Kesho when he had convenient opportunity, and thereby making it known to all the world that the Sahib was worthy of blame, if this humble one had eaten indignation and drunk bitterness, in truth it

might have been said that he deserved his fate. But the contrary of this happened ; and Trench Sahib said, "Shahbash, Krishna, this is well written, but your mistake is exposed." God knows what was my mistake ; but I made salaam, and remained silent.

Therefore, in what I am now about to write there is no certainty whether I shall obtain praise, or suffer blame. What harvest there may be reaped from this sowing is not known. It is my work to make the record, let there be upon its completion whatever judgment there may.

Now in truth it is not to be hidden that when Kesho was permitted to go free, this slave was in much heaviness and perplexity. For I considered that the Sirkar would be displeased that Kesho was not then taken ; and there was this thought also, that the trouble and hardships of us Police would become greater, rather than less. And for many days the grief weighed upon my heart until at last I could no longer endure this burden. So I stood before the Sahib, and I requested that I was sick, and that two months' leave should be granted to me that I might have

change of water and air. Then the Sahib said, "What word is this? How can leave be given at such a time?" But again I made petition and in the end I received one month's leave. I delivered my uniform, which indeed was now much stained by reason of the hard life and want of shelter, to Kashiram the head-constable, and I requested the Sahib to "keep kindness." I had no thought where I should go, and as a leaf that is driven by the wind I walked this way and that, until I came to a railway station. And I asked how far I could travel for one rupee, and they told me to Khairgaum, and I gave a rupee. But afterwards I learnt that the cost of the ticket to Khairgaum was eight annas. This is the zoolum on the railway that the ticket-wallah should eat the money of a poor man. Then at Khairgaum I went to the bazaar and I bought this and that for two rupees and twelve annas; and I ate my fill of bread and sweatmeats, for I said, when may this foolish one have a sufficiency again? And in the darkness I walked into the jungle. There in a secret place I drew off my clothes and hid them under a great stone, and I

wore only a dhoter (loin-cloth). And I smeared myself with white ashes, and put streaks of yellow ochre on my body, and on my head I placed the horse-hair pad. I had bought a brass bowl for the collection of alms, and a three-pronged fork and a necklace of beads; and so I, Krishna, became a bairaghi. Then for many days I wandered; and I travelled, it may be, ten or twelve miles each day, hither and thither, or, as it might be said, upwards and downwards. For it was not my choice to cover the ground in haste. Rather I wished to mingle with whomsoever I might meet, and listen to their converse. My eyes and ears were open, and my mouth shut, for the gold of silence is better than the silver of many words. Now to write too much about small happenings is foolishness; and it is enough to say that for many days I heard nothing of what I would learn. Nothing, that is, which was of any certainty, for vague vapourings and idle talk were as the leaves that fall from the teak trees in Asvin (October). Yet he whom I sought was not idle, for this and that were being done. But what was to be done by him on any occasion I

had not yet learnt beforehand, though it was on this business that my heart was set.

Now five and twenty days had passed, and I had seen many cities and villages and hamlets, and six days only of my leave were remaining. And my flesh was shrunken, for how can a man who all his days has eaten of cooked rice and millet with sometimes goat's flesh sustain himself on a little parched grain? Truly none would say that this is Krishna. And my heart too was heavy. Then it was my destiny that I should meet with two other bairaghis, of whom it might be affirmed that in appearance they were my brothers; and we walked together for two days, and four days were remaining of my leave. None of us three spoke many words; but we walked and ate and slept in company, and something there was in my mind. On the third day at sunset we came to a village called Pimpalwada in which was a temple of Kandoba, and a dhuramshala, and the house of a rich bunya named Sitaram. We slept in the dhuramshala after eating some grain and reciting our vows. There were we three present only and no others; and

I slept at a little distance from these two who lay close together. As I have written, I slept; and there was no noise that I should awake, but yet in the third watch of the night I awoke, and I was aware, although no lamp was burning, that a strange man was present, and was engaged in low conversation with my two companions. I could not hear all that was said, but still something. And the stranger said, "Are we alone?" And one of my friends said, "There is only one man, one of the brethren of the bowl, who sleeps on the further side." Then the stranger struck a match, and came and stood over me and waved his hand across my face, but I stirred not nor made any sign. So he left me, and he spoke with the others in low accents, yet I could hear enough. And the voice of the stranger was known to me; for by the favour of Mahadev it was the voice of Kesho. Then my heaviness became joy, and I understood that my destiny had turned. Now the salt of their words was this, that on the third day an hour before sunset they three with two others should meet at the well, which was two hundred paces to the north

of the village, and then plunder the house of Sitaram. All their information had been attained and all plans arranged. And this precaution was determined on, that my two companions were to remain in the village in order to warn Kesho should anything of a suspicious nature occur between now and then.

There was no further sleep for me that night, for I was turning in my mind what I should do. I dared not leave the place in haste lest something should be understood. So all the morning I begged for alms in the bazaars and alleys with my two companions, though in the great urgency I was fired to be on my way ; for what I desired was to meet Trench Sahib, and first I had to learn where he was. And in the evening, being desperate for an excuse for setting off, I made it known to the other bairaghis that a word had come to me from the God, and I had taken a vow to walk to Kashi, and must even now depart. By my good fortune they did not dissuade me ; so after eating together and reciting shlokas they for their part lay down to sleep while I started on my journey. I knew that there was a railway

station three or four kos to the south; but first I walked for one hour to the north lest there should be any watch upon my movements, and then I made a great chukka (circle) through unfrequented paths in the direction of the south. At dawn my limbs were aching with weariness, but I was glad, for I saw the poles of the lightning wire, and I knew that I had found the railway line. But there was no station for the train, and I knew not on which side I should find one. While I was in doubt I met a wayfarer, from whom I learnt that two miles to the west was the station of Lukhipur, so thither I walked. And now I had to put aside all restraints of prudence, and to incur risks, for how otherwise could I learn what I had to learn? So I entered the office, and the telegraph clerk was alone; and I boldly asked if he would accept five rupees and do my service. I had still a few more rupees with me. He was a good man and he consented. And he talked on the stretched wire with the office at Lolapur, and the reply came that the camp of Trench Sahib was at Loni, which was ten miles from the station of Panchgaum. Then I also learnt that

at midday a train would come which would take me to Panchgaum in four hours. Thence in three or four hours I could walk to the Sahib's camp at Loni ; and then there would be remaining of my leave two days, and on the evening of the last of those days was Kesho Naik to plunder the house of Sitaram. To such a moment of time was my destiny reduced.

I reached the Sahib's camp, and the Sahib was taking food in his tent. And I entered in and stood before the presence, and I said, " Salaam, Sahib." And he started and said, " Yih kya bat hai, what word is this ? Kon hai, be-udab ? Who art thou, unmannerly one ? " Then I remembered that I was a bairaghi, and the Sahib could not know me. And I said, " Sahib, it is Krishna, and this slave has many words to say. I have but two days' leave remaining and the work is to be completed in that time." And I requested that I might sit on the ground, for I was weary ; and permission was given, and I related all the circumstances, for there was no one else present. And the Sahib was glad and said, " Shahbash ! Shahbash ! " And many

things were considered regarding these two days that remained. At the last, when the talk was ended I took courage and said, "Sahib, I have one request." And he said, "Bolo, speak." Then I said, "This time there is no order against shooting?" And he laughed and said, "There is no such order this time."

It was towards evening on the day that Kesho should do his dacoity in the house of Sitaram at Pimpalwada; and by the well to the north of that village there met five men. And it happened that at that time there was proceeding along the road in the front of the village a bullock-coach of substantial build, such as is used on occasions of marriage or for jaunts or junketings; and there were curtains to the windows of the coach, from which it was known that inside there were women. As it was passing along, owing to some roughness in the road the coach came to a standstill; and it was in vain that the driver urged on the bullocks by twisting their tails, and inveighing against their female relatives of several generations. Then the curtains were raised and two nautch girls, in whose hair were many golden and

pearl ornaments, put out their heads to see what had occurred. It may be said that the girls were fair to look upon. Now Kesho, as all know, liked to see a pretty girl ; and what had happened did not escape his eye. So he went to the bullock-coach, and his companions followed him ; but the girls, when they perceived these men approaching, screamed and put down the curtains. But Kesho laughed and said, " Kolo, bai, open, ladies, there is no harm ! " Nor did he care when the curtains were not raised ; and he put his hands to lift them up. Then before one might say " By Mahadev ! " snap went a handcuff on each hand ; and the handcuffs which had been prepared were attached by steel chains to the side walls of the coach, and to attempt to escape only meant hurt to Kesho.

In a moment Trench Sahib put out his head and said to the friends of Kesho, " Stand still, or I fire," and of the four two were holding pistols and two began to run. " Fire," said the Sahib, and four Police sepoys who were in the coach fired their guns, and two of the men fell wounded, but two fled uninjured, for there was no time for

all the sepoys to take good aim. But it was I, Krishna, who put the handcuff on Kesho's right hand, and it was this humble one who by the favour of the Sahib had made this device. For the bullock-coach and the bullocks and the men and the guns were brought by the train, and all was prepared. And it may now be said that the nautch girls were but boys who were trained for the part, seeing that these would not feel fear.

Then Trench Sahib said to Kesho, "The hope was expressed that we might meet again; and now is the expectation gratified."

"I am always glad to meet the Sahib," replied Kesho; and he smiled, nor seemed troubled at his fate. "The Sahib may pardon me that I cannot make salaam properly, since my hands are not free. If the order is given to make loose my hands I will make salaam."

"I will excuse salaams at this time," said Trench Sahib.

Thus in the period of my leave was Kesho Naik taken; and the bitterness was removed from my heart. And then came to me much joy; and

before I slept I ate of rice and goat's flesh and sweetmeats, and I drank milk.

Now this order of the Sirkar is written in the law, that when a man is arrested by the Police he shall be placed before a magistrate within twenty-four hours, but the time that is to be taken on the journey is excepted. By the Police, it is well known, this order of the twenty-four hours is not approved ; and there are many contrivances to overcome it, such as recording the time of the arrest as to-morrow when in truth it was yesterday. But on the morning after Kesho was made prisoner, Trench Sahib being present he gave the order to take Kesho there and then to Diksal, where the magistrate of the division in which Pimpalwada was contained had his cutcherry. The distance was twenty miles by road ; and the Sahib said that before sunset the journey should be completed. Trench Sahib himself was obliged on urgent business to go by the train to Lolapur ; but he was to return the next morning to Diksal. So this order was carried out. Kesho was handcuffed and placed with the two other prisoners in the bullock-coach which

had conveyed the nautch girls; and two constables with loaded guns were in the coach with him and two with loaded guns walked by the coach, one on either side, and I too was walking. Within the time that was laid down we placed the prisoners before the magistrate, who was a Brahmin, by name Trimbuk. It may be said that Trimbuk had a reputation for the eating of bribes. To him report of the circumstances was made. And the magistrate, as is the custom, asked,

"Kesho, son of Gopal, hast thou aught to say?"

But Kesho remained silent. Again the magistrate said,

"Accused number one, hast thou anything to say?'

"Am I accused number one?" asked Kesho.

"Kesho, son of Gopal, accused number one," said Trimbuk, "hast thou anything that thou wouldst say?"

"Accused number one I may be, or number two, or number three, as it may please," answered Kesho, "but of this name Kesho I know nothing, nor why I am placed here."

The magistrate was filled with anger. "What fool of a word is this?" he roared.

"The fool of a word is not mine," said Kesho very quietly. "There was a bullock-coach with nautch girls, and the coach stuck, and the girls called for help, and I, Bala, hastened to give what help I might, upon which, for what cause I know not, I was seized and bound and beaten. Some enemy must have devised this. But the Sirkar shall do me justice."

"Beshuk, without doubt, there shall be justice," said the magistrate in wrath. "This is no time for such foolishness. There shall be justice to-morrow."

"To-day is to-day, and to-morrow is to-morrow," said Kesho as he and his companions were removed. This kind of a man was Kesho.

In the lock-up there were three rooms, and it so happened that all were empty, there being no prisoners. In one of the cells Kesho was placed; while his two companions, who were wounded though not grievously, were taken to the dispensary and there detained, their wounds being treated, and a guard being set over them. Now

the lock-up with the treasury formed a separate block of buildings on one side of the cutcherry, and the guard-room where the Police were stationed was not so close that there was either convenience or safety. The strength of the Police Guard was one head-constable, an old Mahometan named Ali Mohamed, and four constables, Gunga-Din, Govind, Rama, and Genoo. Each constable was on sentry-go, or, as we call it, phara, for four hours at a time ; and the order was that the head-constable should be present at the changing of sentries to see that all was well. When Kesho was placed in the cell the constable on duty was Gunga-Din. No sooner was Kesho removed from the magistrate's presence than he began to say to the Police that he was very ill and in great pain ; and he moaned and groaned piteously. Then they summoned the hospital assistant, who examined him, and gave him medicine, but none the less he continually uttered moans and groans. At eight o'clock Govind relieved Gunga-Din in the presence of Ali Mahomed ; and Kesho protested that he was in extremity of pain, but they paid no heed. And

this protestation ceased not, and at ten o'clock and again at eleven o'clock Kesho made such groaning that Govind feared, and he summoned the head-constable, who opened the door of the cell and looked at Kesho, who was lying on the ground making a desperate noise and saying that he was dying. Then Ali Mahomed again fetched the hospital assistant, who gave more medicine, but still Kesho groaned. And both the hospital assistant and the head-constable became angry, and they said, " Is there no time for us to sleep ? "

At twelve o'clock Govind was relieved by Rama in the presence of Ali Mahomed, and the groaning was still heavier. Then Ali Mahomed said, " Let him make what noise he will ; disturb me no more. May not a man sleep once in the night ? " And this went on and on ; and at four o'clock Genoo, a Mahometan, took charge from Rama, but Ali Mahomed was not present. This Genoo was a young man ; and he feared when Kesho continued to cry and bawl. At length Kesho said, " I am dying ; give me water to drink." And Genoo was putting a lota of water through the bars of the cell. But Kesho said, " I cannot

move ; come and pour it in my mouth." And Genoo being in fear went to Ali Mohamed, that he might come and open the door. Then the head-constable was greatly enraged because again he could not enjoy his ease ; and he abused Genoo and gave him the key of the door, and said, "Give him water until he drown." So Genoo went back and he unlocked the door, while Kesho was groaning softly as though he were dying ; and he stooped low to give him water. Then Kesho dashed his handcuffed hands into Genoo's face, and he fell stunned, and again Kesho struck him on the head. And Kesho, knowing how this can be done, brought the handcuffs with great force on to the stone floor, and they became open, and so his hands were free. He still moaned somewhat, so that there might not be suspicion or alarm at his silence. Then he took off the uniform of Genoo and he wore it himself, and he took Genoo's gun, and walked away without any interruption and went to the dispensary. There he saw that the constable who should be watching the two wounded prisoners was asleep. He gave him a heavy blow on his

head with the butt of Genoo's gun, and then rousing his two friends he showed them who he was, and bade them follow him. For they were not so wounded but that they could march a little distance, though not without pain; but a man may endure some pain to save his neck. And there was no one to make hindrance, for all slept. Of such a temperament was Kesho Naik.

The two wounded men could not walk far, and Kesho hit upon this device to save them. He had observed in the evening that not far from the cutcherry there was a bullock-cart full of stacks of jawari. And he understood that in the morning the owner would come and yoke his bullocks and remove the cart. To this place Kesho brought his friends, and he took out half of the jawari stalks and placed the two men in the cart, and piled up the remainder of the jawari upon them. It is not to be said that they could enjoy comfort, but of what account is comfort when the neck is in danger? And as Kesho expected, at dawn there came a man with bullocks, and he yoked them in, and was driving his cart on the road to the railway station, little knowing what burden

he carried. And Kesho in the dress of a Police constable walked a little behind the cart. Now it so happened that Trench Sahib had come by the night train, and Kesho saw him some way off riding a bunya's pony. Then Kesho, making his uniform loose and his puggri on one side, ran at great pace to meet the Sahib, and he said, "Sahib, Sahib, Kesho has escaped, and all the Police are searching for him. This humble one was sent to meet the Sahib and give him news." Then Trench Sahib said, "Goddam," and he rode fast to the cutcherry at Pimpalwada. Such things it pleased Kesho to do; and he laughed as the Sahib rode away.

I have written that the poor people were praising Kesho, for he gave them much money that he took from the rich. And now he began to come to terms with the driver of the bullock-cart; and it is not wonderful that upon the promise of a good reward the man acceded. This man went to a shop in a hamlet by the roadside, and bought some clothes such as a countryman might wear, and Kesho put them on in the jungle, and threw Genoo's uniform and gun down

a well. And the end of these circumstances was that in the night Kesho and his companions stood outside the railway station in a dark place while the cartman entered the office and purchased tickets. Then they walked along the line and climbed up and so walked back on to the platform and mingled with the crowd. By this device the Police who were watching the entrance into the station did not see them. So they got away.

After some days Kesho sent this letter to the Sahib :—

" To Trench Sahib Bahadur,
Assistant Superintendent of Police.

" From Kesho Naik.

" The third day of the dark half.

" It was by favourable opportunity that this slave met the Sahib Bahadur at Pimpalwada ; and there came much joy at seeing the Sahib's face and in the renewal of acquaintance. But through bad destiny, this humble one having other work to do was unable to remain and enjoy conversation at that time. It was I, Kesho,

wearing dress of Constable Genoo, who met the Sahib on the following morning and gave information of the escape; and in the bullock-cart, beneath the jawari, were my two servants. The uniform and gun of Genoo will be found in the well behind the hamlet halfway to the railway on the west side of the road. Why should much be written? Let there be friendship. This is my request.

"The signature of Kesho Naik."

This is what this humble one had to write. And if it be thought that this one or that was worthy of blame in what happened it is to be remembered that Kesho was such a man that no equal to him is to be found in the whole world.

CHAPTER III

THE ASTOUNDING ROBBERY OF THE TREASURE IN THE TRAIN

It is in this world a strange thing that if a man sets his hand to the doing of business, or for that matter it may be pleasure, in which hitherto he has had no part, that new thing may shortly become a habit. If anyone had said that to me, Krishna. the work of writing down these stories should at any time be a custom, he would have been thought to have seven tongues like the truthless ones who come from the Punjab. But the wonder is that such a thing has indeed occurred; and I, who only hoped to please the Sahibs in the taking of thieves and robbers, and so obtain promotion in the Police service, have been exalted to the position of a writer of histories. If what I have recorded, or may yet record, affords satisfaction, this must have been written in the book of my destiny. For it is sure that of himself

this humble one has no skill in the guiding of a pen ; and whatever favourable result there may be is due to good fortune. But Trench Sahib says that the writing is proper, and that on no account should I leave it until all that Kesho Naik has done has been printed, remembering this only, that every circumstance should be set down exactly as it happened, without any less or more. And in the end the Sahib who has the chap-khana in London is to publish the book, and send me more rupees than the Sirkar will grant me as pension. There is however the fear that a simple man may become proud ; and this danger is to be avoided. The burden also is heavy ; for the doings of Kesho are as the hairs of the head in number. Nevertheless the order must receive obedience.

This then is one of the acts of daring that Kesho did. It was known to him—and in truth such was his cleverness that what was not known to him who should say ?—that on every fifteenth day much gold was carried in the train from the mines of Mysore to the harbour of Bombay, whence it was sent in the fire-boat to London.

For many mines had been dug in the country of Mysore ; and if some had been found unfruitful, yet from others were lakhs and crores of gold taken away. This gold was far under the earth, and it was mingled with quartz and gravel, and there was much labour in obtaining this prize. But the English Sahibs had brought engines and other wonderful machines such as we people had neither seen nor heard of before ; and passages and roadways were made deep down and the workmen descended and ascended with great convenience. There were ropes and chains and pulleys and fire-wagons underground ; and there was no darkness, for there were everywhere lamps that by the turning of a handle in one direction instantly filled the place with light as of the sun or the moon, and again by turning it in a contrary direction the light was gone. And the quartz and the gravel containing the gold were put into vast mills, and the wheels with the strength of a Rakshas crushed all that was placed before them, and then here was golden ore in beautiful yellow powder, and there was the rubbish from which it had been taken out. And then the powder was

made into bars of metal, each weighing five pounds or two seers and a half. To us people it seemed that the gins and the peris must have made this device. Of a truth the Sahibs can do wonderful things, nor is the manner of them to be understood by us. And yet in other matters these same Sahibs are led away by idle talk, and what is well known to the children playing in the bazaar is beyond the ear of their understanding. For it seems to them that if a man speaks many words and asserts this and that about the ruling of the state he is somebody, whereas in truth he is not to be listened to, for the heart of the people is apart from such empty vapourings.

Now Kesho, as I have said, had knowledge of this gold, and how it was sent to Bombay, on what day, and by what train, and how it was packed, and how it was guarded, and whatever more particulars there were to be known. And this angered him that the treasure was sent away to London for the English Sahibs; and he said, "It is not meet that these robbers who have taken our country should also take the gold from the earth and remove it to their islands where all

men have riches, while here the land is in poverty and people are crying. It is the time to make a plan that we may lay hold of this treasure and distribute it among the poor." In this way he was speaking to his companions, and his words pleased them ; and they considered many ways by which they should possess themselves of the gold. And at last by the contrivance of one Jiwan who before he joined Kesho's band had been a servant on the railway, and for a number of offences had been dismissed and also sent to jail, the arrangements were at last completed. And this was the order of Kesho, that not a little of the gold in the train should be seized, but nothing less than the whole of it. And he laughed and said, " This will be a good tamasha (amusement). What will Trench Sahib say ? "

The line of railway over which travelled the train with the gold passed for some miles through dense forest, and the country was hilly. The train travelled fast down the hills but slowly up them. It is to be said that whereas on some line the track is double and the trains may cross each other where they will, as bullock-carts on the

highway, on this line there was a road for one train only, and there was crossing only at the stations. On some lines also the wagons are large and broad, but on this they were small and narrow, the space between the rails being less, and this was all favourable to Kesho. There were two stations about eight miles apart, named Hongal and Bilgi. The whole way from the one to the other was a steep incline, and the station of Bilgi was at the top. Both of these, Bilgi and Hongal, were but small stations. About halfway between the two there was a branch line of railway that diverged from the main line, and ran for the length, it may be, of one mile, into the jungle. The opening on to this line was as one goes down the incline from Bilgi ; and on the branch the same incline continued for half a mile, and then to the end there was a rise. The branch line was only used during part of the year for the conveyance of timber that was cut in the forest ; and at this season it was closed, and long grass and bushes, which spring up quickly in this district, were growing between the rails where the lesser line left the greater. This was all

known to Kesho, who had also ascertained that the train bearing the treasure of gold was to reach Bilgi at two o'clock in the night. It was the dark half of the month; and from this too there was advantage to Kesho.

As I have written, the manner of packing the gold was also known to Kesho. And the gold was packed in this fashion. Each bar weighed five pounds. In this consignment there were sixty bars, and these were distributed among ten strong boxes of teak wood, six bars being contained in each box. For the computation of value it may be estimated that a pound's weight of gold is worth about fifty-six sovereigns of English gold coinage. Each bar therefore was equal to two hundred and eighty sovereigns of gold. Thus the whole number of sixty bars was equal to no less than sixteen thousand, eight hundred sovereigns. When it is considered that each sovereign is worth fifteen rupees, and that the full value of the sixty bars came to two lakhs and fifty-two thousand rupees, then it may be understood that Kesho Naik had no equal in audacity in any nation. So much for the value;

but to this too must be given attention. The weight of each bar being five pounds the weight of four bars would be twenty pounds; and for convenience in walking a long distance a man might conveniently carry twenty pounds' weight, and no more, without attracting observation, although it were an easier burden to carry four bars weighing each five pounds, than one of twenty pounds. For the several bars could be distributed here and there according to each man's taste and pleasure. But even thus fifteen men were required. If Kesho were pleased to order it he might have had fifty men whom he could trust.

The first part of the device was this. If the driver of an engine on approaching a station sees that the lamp on the distant signal is of red colour he may not take his train into the station, for a red lamp signifies danger; but he is required to halt, and await the setting of a green lamp. Kesho and Jiwan stood not far from the signal post half an hour before the train should come, and the hamal, whose name was Tookeram, after receiving the order from the station-master went

to the signal, climbed up the ladder, and fixed the green light. When he came down Kesho gave him a great blow on the head, and he fell on the ground senseless. That was the beginning of Kesho's tamasha. Whether Tookeram were dead or only stunned was not a matter which concerned Kesho at all; for to such an one the life or death of a man who came in his way was of no account. They placed the senseless Tookeram behind a wall, and then Jiwan climbed up and placed the red lamp in position, covering up the green lamp. Thus the train could not enter the station. Then Kesho and Jiwan, and three others who were with them, waited till the train should come. Before long they heard the whistle of the engine, and the rumbling and the roaring of the wagons, and they perceived the great lamps in front of the engine, and the lights in the carriages. And they were standing in the shelter of some bushes near where the end of the train would be when it should come to a standstill. The next thing that happened was this. The driver seeing the red light slowed down his train, at the same time sounding the whistle in order

to attract the attention of the station-master who should put up the green signal. And he was angered that he had to stop, for on account of the steep incline it would be difficult to start his train again. But the signal remained unchanged, and he was compelled to halt outside the station. Then he became filled with anger, and he sounded his whistle very loud again and again. All this time Kesho and his men were lying in wait, and they softly crept on to the line just behind the guard's van, which was the hindmost wagon on the train and contained the treasure. And three of the men went softly to the other side of the train, and two of these were standing on the foot-board of the van. At length the guard, who was a Goanese named De Souza, looked out of his window to see what was the matter, and he saw the signal set against the train ; and still the driver in his anger was making his whistle scream. Then what was to happen happened. De Souza opened the door of his van on the side which should be alongside the platform ; and carrying his lantern he stepped down, intending to walk to the station to inquire into the cause of the delay.

No sooner had he set foot on the ground than Kesho seized him by the throat with such an iron grip that he could utter no sound. At the very same moment Jiwan snatched the lantern from his hand, and standing in front of De Souza, who was now lying on the ground by the force of a blow from Kesho, waved his lantern in the manner of guards when they would signify that all is well. Thus no one could see what was being done behind Jiwan as he was swinging his lamp; and in truth all of the passengers who were not asleep were looking out in the direction of the engine. And Jiwan moved a little forward to the front of the guard's van; and the light of his lantern fell on the coupling that joined the van to the next carriage. Meanwhile the two men on the other side of the guard's van had stealthily opened the door on that side, and had entered the van. Their business it was to deal with the two constables who were in charge of the gold. One of these was asleep on the floor, and the other was looking out of the window towards the front of the train. To this one they both gave a heavy blow on the back of his head before he was aware

of their presence, and he fell on the floor like a black-buck that is hit by a bullet. The constable who was sleeping received the same treatment. All this was done without a sound. The third man too was at the same time doing his work. With little difficulty he withdrew the bolt which secures the couplings ; and the guard's van with two lakhs and a half in gold was separated from the train.

By this time something had occurred at the station. The station-master, who was a Brahmin, became irritated when he heard so much frantic whistling from the engine, and he began to call out for Tookeram. But none could find Tookeram anywhere. Then the station-master, unable any more to suffer this intolerable whistling, went out of his office, and he saw the train standing a long way off, and he looked at the distant signal and he saw that it was at danger, although he had given the order to Tookeram to place the green light. And being helpless, as no Tookeram was to be found, he himself walked to the signal post and climbed up, and set the green light. And he was venting curses on Tookeram. Then the

driver gave two sharp whistles to show that he would start the train, and he looked back at the guard's van to see the lantern waved in token that all was well at that end. And Jiwan stood on the foot-board swinging the lantern. Then there was one short whistle, and the driver put on the steam, and began to start the train, upon which Jiwan stepped inside the van and closed his lantern. Kesho and the other three men were also in the van. With great difficulty and much furious puffing of steam the driver at last drew his train up at the platform. He did not suspect that the guard's van was not attached to the train, and he began to abuse the station-master, and each abused the other.

When they became tired of uttering abuses, the driver said to the station-master, " Get your business done with the guard, and let me get on." For at every station the guard goes to the office and there is much signing of papers. What all the signing is for, God knows. The station-master after a few more abuses went to his office expecting to find the guard there, but there was no guard, and he became the more angry that

Tookeram and De Souza had played him such tricks. So he went off to where the guard's van should be, having a mind to abuse the guard, but there was no guard and no guard's van. Then he became annoyed, and he went to the engine driver and gave more abuses, and asked where he had left the guard's van. And the driver swore that at the distant signal the guard had shown " all well " with his lantern. And there was much confusion in the minds of each, for they knew of the treasure ; and the conclusion that they came to was that by some misfortune the van had become uncoupled, and had run back by its own impetus down the incline to Hongal. Then the station-master began to send many messages along the stretched wires ; and the message that he sent to Hongal was this : " Three up arrived distant signal all well, after delay owing to mistake in signals drew up at station minus guard's van with golden treasure. There must have been fortuitous separation and spontaneous retrogression to Hongal. Please arrange. Engine follows." He then gave orders to the driver to uncouple his engine and work back

slowly to Hongal to pick up De Souza and his van wherever he might light upon them.

Now is it my business to relate what was done by Kesho. As soon as the red signal was changed to green and the train started up the incline to the station, the guard's van, in which were himself and the four others and the treasure, was left standing, the brake being on. Then by Kesho's orders the brake was released, though not altogether lest the van should lose control, but its force was reduced ; and the van began to proceed down the hill. And so for four miles, with what more or less there may have been, the van travelled at a gentle pace. So they came to where the branch line went off into the forest. One of the band was holding a small lamp at this spot to let them know where they were. And the bushes had been cut away, and the points were opened for the van to run on to the branch line. This then took place just as had been planned ; and when the van had gone on to the branch line the points were replaced, and the bushes were stuck into the ground as though they were growing, so that no one should see any difference. And the

van descended cautiously to the end of the incline, and when it came to where the line commenced to ascend, it came to a stop. Then Kesho having heard something commanded silence, for the number of men present was now fifteen. And while all were silent they heard the engine coming down the hill on the main line. And at the junction with the branch line it stopped, and some examination was made with a lantern, but nothing suspicious was observed, for the bushes were it seemed growing as usual, and the van could not have passed over such obstruction ; so the engine proceeded towards Hongal.

" Arhe bapre ! " said Kesho. " See the foolishness of these blind ones ! This is a fortunate time ; now is our opportunity. Let us make ready some shikar for Trench Sahib." Then as speedily as might be the men rushed into the van and hurled the ten boxes containing the treasure out on to the ground, and with axes and hammers they began to break them open.

It is to be remembered that all this was going on between two and three o'clock at night, in the depths of the forest. If any one could have

been present he would have seen a strange sight, and he would have wondered what work of men or magic of devils was being accomplished. For this was an extraordinary thing that in this secluded spot in the jungle there should be the guard's van of a railway train, and yet no railway to be seen, for the track which was on the level of the ground was overgrown with grass and weeds so the rails might not be perceived without difficulty, nor were there poles or wires or fencing; and had anyone witnessed the scenes he might say, how has so great a wagon come into this wild place? Surely it must have been brought through the air. And Jiwan was holding the guard's lantern to enable the work to be done; and there was smashing and crashing of boxes with the blows of the hammers and axes; and the sight of the men delivering vehement blows and tearing open the boxes was as though ghouls were engaged in some unholy operation. The forest animals too that were disturbed in their habitation by this wild irruption were joining in the mischief; and jackals were yelling and hyenas were shrieking in anger and fear because Kesho and his men

had trespassed upon their limits. At length the business was brought to an end ; and to each of the fifteen men were distributed six bars of the Mysore gold.

Now, when the engine had come near to Hongal and yet there was no sign of the missing van more amazement came to the driver and his fireman. The signal was set for entering the station as the message had come from Bilgi that the engine was to be expected, so the driver drew up at the platform and sounded the whistle furiously. Then came the station-master, who was angry because he was disturbed from his sleep ; and the driver too was desperately angry on account of all the misfortunes. And I have found too that at such an hour of the night even men with equable temperaments are apt to become hot.

" Arhe Baba," said the driver, " what have you done with my dam guard's van ? "

It is to be noted that our people on the railways who mingle with European guards and drivers have followed the custom to call everything " dam."

" Kum-bukht, be-wakoof ! ill-fated foolish one,"

replied the station-master, "what should I know of your dam van? You will lose your dam engine next. This is all muskeri (play-acting). Is it not a time to sleep when the train is gone? But you come back here with a fool's word of a lost van. What female relations have there been of you and your father and grandfather, be-shuram, shameless one! Your service in the company will soon end."

"Chup-raho, you four-anna-bribe-eating be-faida, worthless one! Stop this dam muskeri, and tell me where the van is. Where is De Souza? He should have met me here. The van cannot have run through your dam station since the road is level."

"This talk is foolishness," said the station-master. "God knows where your van and your whole dam train are. Go and search for them in my office if you like."

Then both gave many abuses for a long time. And in the end the driver was perforce made to believe that his guard's van had not come to Hongal, and he was in great fear, for he saw that this must be the work of evil spirits. So there

was nothing left to him but to take "line-clear," and return to Bilgi. It would take many days if I were to write down all that was spoken at Bilgi, for all were filled with terror and astonishment. The train could not leave the station without a guard's van because the brake was needed to control the speed on the incline to the next station. So messages were sent to many stations, and at last it was learned that a spare van lay in the siding at Lipani, thirty miles off; and the unhappy driver was compelled to take his engine there to fetch it. By the time that this was completed day had dawned; and then there was more ghur-bhur (confusion), and more terror and uncertainty, for the body of Tookeram was found lying where Kesho and Jiwan had placed it, and whether he were alive or dead could not with certainty be determined. But it was understood that there was some great devilry; and men began to speak of Kesho, for Kesho's name had become famous.

Now it must be written what was done by Kesho and his band. When the bars of gold had been distributed the fifteen men separated into three

parties of five each, and they were to go by different ways and meet at the place where they were at that time concealing themselves. Kesho, it should be said, never kept the same hiding-place for a long time, but constantly selected new places, so that his whereabouts should not be known. For the carrying away of the gold the men adopted various devices. Some placed their bars in bundles of bedding such as many people take on their travels, and others stowed them in their clothing, a few who wore large puggris placing them therein. Five of the men were to walk to Hongal and there take tickets for the train. Five were to make their way many miles round by country tracks to another station. But Kesho said: "I will see what is doing at Bilgi," and he and Jiwan and three more walked through the jungle to that place. And Kesho laughed when he saw all the confusion that he had caused. The train was still standing there. Each of the five took tickets for different stations, nor did they speak to each other nor seem to know one another. Yet all as it were by chance sat in a carriage which happened to be empty. And

Kesho asked the station-master how it was that there was a train so soon, as he had not expected one for some hours. So daring a man was Kesho ! But the station-master gave him abuses and bade him move aside. In this manner the five passed away safely from Bilgi ; and in the end all met in their hiding-place.

Later on came Trench Sahib with many Police ; and walking down the line between Bilgi and Hongal they discovered what a trick had been played, for by daylight it was seen that the van had passed on to the branch line. And De Souza and the two constables who were to guard the treasure recovered after many days, but of Tookeram there was no recovery.

This then was one of the terrible deeds that was done by Kesho Naik. If it be said that it was his fate, who shall affirm the contrary ? And this too is known, that much gold was given to the poor.

CHAPTER IV

THE TERRIBLE DACOITY AT BAGIWADI

There are many things to be written concerning the wonderful exploits of Kesho; but it has come to me, that the tale would not be complete if I did not set down one example of his more ordinary doings. And for this a recital of the dacoity in the town of Bagiwadi may suffice. It is to be said that in the eyes of the people Kesho was an incarnation of justice. They regarded him as one who should redress their wrongs; and they gave the name "Protector of the Poor." Thus if a cultivator were ruined by a sowkar, or money-lender, and his fields were taken from him, but he could obtain no justice in the cutcherries of the Sirkar, he would make his request to Kesho. And the hand of Kesho was heavy upon any who oppressed the poor. Some for the zoolum that they did had their noses cut off; and others lost their lives.

One day it happened that this letter was delivered to Kesho, though by what mysterious means it reached him is not known :—

"To Kesho Naik, the open-handed and magnificent as the sun, valorous and victorious, always courageous, the generous, prudent, and pillar of fortitude, the defender of religion, prosperous in all things, above all councillors, protector of the poor, we your servants write with all the veneration and respect that your dignity is entitled to. Be it known that in the town of Bagiwadi in the district of Kaludghee there is one Devidass, a money-lender, who is without pity and without conscience. This man came twenty-five years ago from the north, having not one hundred rupees in his possession; and now this stony-hearted one has waxed rich by the miseries of the poor whom he has seized in his net. Widows and orphans are ruined by his craft, and their fields have become his; and his coffers are overflowing with silver and gold. There is no justice and the cry is heavy. This is the request that the Protector of the Poor

should come quickly and give redress to the suffering. Why should much be written? Let there be kindness.

"The people of Bagiwadi and the surrounding country."

"This is to be seen to," said Kesho, when the letter was read to him. "But inquiries must first be made as to the truth of this petition. Let it not be said that Kesho ever inflicted punishment until he had investigated circumstances and obtained truth."

And Kesho, being pleased at the titles accorded to him in the letter, and seeing also that this might be an undertaking of some magnitude, he determined that he would go himself to learn all that was to be discovered concerning Devidass and the people of Bagiwadi. The distance was three full days' journey on horseback from his place of concealment; notwithstanding that Kesho's ride in one day was of the longest. He went in the guise of a small merchant, carrying in the wallets of his pony articles of cheap jewellery and knives and beads, the pretence of selling which

would admit him to many houses whether of rich or poor. And arriving on the third evening at a village not far from Bagiwadi he found shelter for the night in the house of a poor cultivator. Kesho was always, when it suited him, very pleasant and affable in his demeanour; and he was speedily on good terms with Govindram, for this, it should be said, was the name of the man whose hospitality he was enjoying, more especially as he sold several gewgaws to his family for considerably less than their value. From this Govindram he learnt many things concerning the exactions of Devidass. Govindram himself had borrowed from him twenty years ago three hundred rupees on the security of his land for the celebration of his son's marriage; and though he had by this time paid the amount of the loan many times over in interest, the money-lender's books proved that he was now in debt to him for five hundred rupees.

"How this may be," said Govindram, "God knows; but from three hundred rupees and some signatures the weight is upon my neck. And now this Shaitan must have these five hundred

rupees, or he will obtain the Civil Court decree for my fields, and take them as he has taken those of a hundred cultivators hereabouts."

"What was the agreement?" asked Kesho.

"The agreement seemed not unreasonable," said Govindram. "I was to give him five rupees a month interest until the principal was repaid. For fifteen years I rendered five rupees a month, that is sixty rupees in the year, or nine hundred rupees in all, but the principal I could not repay. Then came a famine, and I could do nothing for twelve months, and though I have since paid more and more, yet for that lapse of time the interest became greater, and now I am reduced to this extremity."

Then Kesho spoke sweet words and gave some promise of help, though what the help might be he did not disclose. And he went with Govindram to a dozen villages roundabout, and Govindram showed him many men who told him like stories, until Kesho became greatly angered in his heart.

After that he went by himself to the house of Devidass in the dress of a holy man, and by this deception he gained admittance. He begged for

alms, and recited shlokas, or verses from the sacred Geetas ; and receiving four pice he made a great show of blessing Devidass for his charity. In this way he became acquainted with the rooms of the house and the means of entrance and the number of persons resident at the place. Then in the evening he returned to the house of Govindram, and the next morning, after promising to come back soon and remove all difficulties, he mounted his pony and rode away to his hiding-place. Of such places he had many ; and he never continued in the same for long at one time. This one was a half-ruined temple situated in a deep glen in the depths of the mountains. The temple was occupied by himself and a few of his more intimate followers, while the remainder of his band had constructed for themselves rough huts of grass and brushwood. The place was one that would strike terror into any whose nature was not made hard by a desperate and dangerous life, for it seemed that here ghosts and evil spirits must have their abode. The wind roared and howled around the rocks and stunted trees that enclosed the ravine ; and a sense of unknown

horror encompassed the locality. At this dreadful spot on the evening after he had rejoined his band Kesho called together his men, and thus addressed them :

" There is a great work before us, brothers. It is known that on some occasions more men are required, and on others less. At times five of us have done the work. For what lies before us now there must be not fewer than five and twenty. There came to me word that punishment is necessary for the oppression of Devidass, money-lender of Bagiwadi in Kaludghee. I myself have proved the truth of the report. I have also seen the house of this oppressor of my people. It is strongly built and well protected ; for it is guarded by three brawny Bhayas (up-country men) ; and these have guns. It is said that in jewels and money Devidass possesses lakhs of rupees. These must he be compelled to disgorge. And the banking books in which are set down the debts due to him by the poor, and the mortgages and papers of accounts, are to be burnt. So will there be a deliverance of the people. There will be a great distribution of money to those whom he

has robbed, and our coffers will also be replenished. Of the man himself the fate is to be seen. Kalee, our sacred goddess, calls me to this task; and who can disobey the 'Mother'? What say ye, brothers; is it well?"

"Jai Kalee! Kesho Naik ki jai!" all shouted in approval, the sound echoing and re-echoing through the ravine.

"Well, well!" said Kesho. "At dawn of day we set forth. The journey is a long one. We take separate ways, not more than five going together. On the fourth evening, an hour after sundown we meet at the peepul tree by the road-side well, one kos this side of Bagiwadi. And now, that the holy Mother may bless us, bring hither the sacred axe."

One of them came forward bearing in his hands what appeared to be a roll of cloths. One by one the coverings were unfolded, until upon a rich piece of gold embroidery was seen a large heavy blade. This was placed with much care and reverence upon a small heap of stones which were daubed with vermilion, and decorated with a few dried flowers of the sacred toolsee plant. Then

while all stood in an attitude of deep respect, Kesho bowed low before the axe, and cried, "Mother Kalee, be propitious!" Upon this all the men again shouted, "Jai Kalee! Jai Bhawani!" As the noise died away a pack of jackals took up the cry, their shrill voices resounding through the glen, and an owl hooted from a neighbouring tree. "Mother Kalee has spoken," said Kesho. "It is enough. Now to rest, for the work before us needs strength."

To his men Kesho had allotted four days for the journey to Bagiwadi; but he himself with one companion arrived at the house of Govindram on the evening of the third day, for he had preparations to make. And to Govindram, after making him take an oath of fidelity upon Ganges water and the cow's tail, he unfolded the whole matter. Some ten men of those who had suffered most wrong from Devidass were then called, and the same oath given to them. And all were filled with joy that a deliverance was to come. Three guns were obtained and some long spears, as also bombs and torches, for these things could not be brought from so great a distance as

Kesho's place of concealment. A heavy trunk of a tree such as ten men might carry was placed upon two bullock-carts, and four bullocks were kept in readiness for use when they should be needed. Kesho also walked quietly through the town to make himself certain of the twistings and the turnings of the streets, and he went to the Police station, where a dozen or more men were present, and with these he entered into conversation. After he had spoken about the harvest and the rainfall, and the price of grain, and the hardships of Police service, and many other things, he began to talk about robbers and dacoits.

"What is this," he asked, "that people are saying in the bazaar about one Kesho Naik? It would seem that there is much fear of this man. Does his name chance be known to you?"

"There has been talk of some such fire-eater," answered Hyder Khan, a Mahometan head-constable; "but these limits have not been troubled. If he comes here are not we ready for him?"

"Be-shuk, certainly, it is seen that you and your Behadurs are ready. It is known that

rumour is many times false ; but what they are saying in the bazaar is that this faithless one has designs on the villages to the east of Bagiwadi."

Hyder Khan laughed. " Arhe bhai," he said, " let him come. We people are ready."

So Kesho after making salaam left them. The next evening, when it had become dark, there was a great gathering of horsemen and footmen on the road by the well, Kesho and his twenty-four jawans being present, and also the cultivators with Govindram. To prevent any surprise Kesho posted a man with a gun on either side of this assembly. The bullock-carts with the tree trunk were also on the road. Then Kesho bade his followers stand in a circle round him while he recited shlokas and made invocations to the goddess Kalee, and all repeated " Jai Kalee." Then they ate and drank and refreshed themselves. The next thing that this son of crafty parents did was to send two of the cultivators who came from a village on the other side of the town, and distant not less than three kos, to inform the Police that Kesho Naik and many dacoits were attacking their village ; and by this

deceit the Police were all enticed away. Then when two hours had passed, and Kesho considered that these meddlesome ones, as he called them, were at a safe distance, and all the townsfolk would be asleep, the word was given to set forth on the enterprise, a guard of four men being left in charge of the ponies.

The residence of the sowkar Devidass was in the centre of the town of Bagiwadi, the population of which might be about four thousand. The house was of two stories, each containing a number of rooms ; and it was built round an open court-yard, in the centre of which was a tank. The house stood back six or seven paces from the street ; and the compound, or enclosure, was portected by a strong and high brick wall. A solid gate of teak-wood, heavily bolted and barred at night-time, hung between two substantial wooden pillars. The door of the house itself was also exceptionally massive. The inmates of the dwelling, including women and children, numbered in all not less than thirty. There were Devidass and his wife Radhabai, their two sons aged respectively eighteen and sixteen with their wives, two

married daughters and their husbands, two younger brothers of Devidass with their wives and children, and various male and female servants. Among the retainers were three Bhayas, or men from the north, who by reason of their strength and courage and their faithfulness to their employers are commonly maintained as watchmen in the houses of rich people. It should be said that Devidass, unlike the majority of his brother money-lenders, was a man of some vigour and activity; and he was practiced in exercises of clubs.

At an hour before midnight on the day that Kesho had come to do his justice, with the exception of the sowkar himself and one of the Bhayas who was on watch, all the members of the household were fast asleep. Devidass had had a busy day, paying out money on loan which would soon return to him in interest many times over, receiving payments on account of advances made to landholders, and dealing with correspondence from bankers in other cities; and he was still seated on a small mattress, and leaning against a large cushion, while he scrutinised his

account-books and completed the entries of payments and receipts. This done he proceeded to count the cash in his money-bags, the contents of which amounted to several thousands of rupees; and this operation took a considerable time. At last he was satisfied that all was correct; and taking a large key that was suspended from his waist by a silver chain he opened his safe and placed the bags therein. Then he withdrew from the safe many jewels of gold set with rubies and emeralds and pearls and lovingly dusted them. These too, after admiring each one, he carefully replaced in the safe, which he securely locked. "Shiv! Shiv!" he said as he resumed his seat on the mattress, "it is little enough after all these years. The toil is great and the reward is small. Truly with all my expenses something more requires to be done. There must be no further delay in foreclosing that mortgage of Govindram. The papers shall be placed in the Civil Court to-morrow. I have shown too much kindness to that ungrateful one. His are good fields, and will swell my estate. Yet will I not, as others would, deal harshly and send him adrift. He shall continue

to cultivate the land as my labourer. Shiv! Shiv! It is slow work."

Bang, bang, bang! crash, crash, crash! sounded from without; and rushing to the small window which opened on to the street the sowkar saw the glare of numberless torches, that turned the darkness of night into the brightness of day. Wild and terrifying shouts filled the air, and the heart of Devidass sank within him as he heard cries of "Jai Kalee! Kesho Naik ki jai!" "Great Shiv!" he ejaculated, "what word is this? They cannot be coming to my poor house!" But it was soon understood that the design was upon his house, for the tumult and uproar increased in front of his door. The explosion of bombs as they were hurled on the ground seemed to rend the air; the discharge of muskets accompanied the din of the bombs; and the incessant shouts and cries and yells of men were such as to turn the bravest into a coward. And when Devidass perceived that the men were calling out his own name and uttering oaths and curses he understood that his destiny had turned. Nevertheless he retained some courage.

"Ramchuran! Rambux! Kalidass!" he shouted to his watchmen, "awake, arise, make ready, load your guns! Here are robbers; let the Police be summoned!" And he hastened to alarm all the members of his family, and bid the men get what weapons they could, and the women hide themselves in the recesses of the house. And then if the tumult outside the house was great, who should say that it was not greater within? For the women and children, beside themselves with terror, were shrieking at the top of their voices, and some of the men also were uttering groans and cries, and seeking to hide themselves with the women; and the confusion was such that no one could hear himself speak. In the end Devidass with the three Bhayas, his eldest son and his two brothers, stood in the entrance-room on the lower story to resist the robbers as best they might.

"Kolo, kolo! Open, open!" shouted Kesho and his men from the street, when the explosions of bombs had ceased; and then there being no sign of opening the gate muskets were discharged against the house, and the bullets, striking the

wall and piercing the windows, caused more terror. "Kolo, kolo!" shouted the robbers; but Devidass bade the Bhayas fire their guns into the crowd from an upper window, and then rejoin him below. And in this discharge of guns one of Kesho's men was wounded.

"Now for the tree-trunk," shouted Kesho. "There shall be payment for this." And ten of the strongest men seized hold of the heavy mass, and beginning at some distance they first walked and then ran, and finally gathering together all their strength, with the impetus of an elephant and the speed of a horse, they dashed the trunk against the gate; and with a crash as of a rock exploded by gunpowder the massive teak-wood shivered asunder into a thousand fragments.

"Shahbash!" said Kesho; and his men cried, "Kesho Naik ki jai!" And in the house the men and the women who were hiding heard this destruction and they uttered shriek upon shriek. The seven men below understood that a calamity had in truth been appointed; but yet they remained standing.

"Kolo, kolo!" shouted Kesho and his men,

who were now standing within the compound, and their blood was on fire for plunder and murder.

"Again the tree," said Kesho, seeing that the door remained closed. Once more ten men seized this burden and carried it back into the street, so that they might have space to acquire impetus. And the foremost of these ten was Kesho. Again with irresistible force this heavy mass crashed into the door and splintered it into fragments; and a crowd of men armed with spears and guns rushed into the house.

How can I, Krishna, describe the desperate struggle that now followed? We people know what it is to be awakened in the dead of night by armed men, yelling and shouting and firing guns; but how can it be understood by the Sahibs in London what a dacoity is like? In this terror of confusion and tumult and uproar how can it be said that this, that, or the other happened first? In the beginning there was a lamp burning, and Devidass, seeing that the man in front of his assailants was the leader, he attacked him with a club. Kesho was out of breath with the burden of the tree and so was taken at disadvantage;

and sustaining a heavy blow on the head he for a moment fell on the ground. Filled with anger at this sight, three of his men shouting " Jai Kalee ! " hurled themselves upon Devidass, and pinned him down ; and one of them holding a gun to his breast would have shot him there and then. But Kesho springing up knocked the weapon aside, and said, " Let him live now ; there is something for him to see before he meets his fate." Then Rambux, when he understood that Kesho was the leader of the band, fired his gun at him, and the bullet grazed his shoulder. Upon this one of Kesho's men, infuriated at this sight, drove his spear through the breast of Rambux, and the point came out behind his back, and with a curse upon Kesho the Bhaya sank to the ground and died. Others too on both sides were dealing thrusts with spears, and firing guns ; and there were shouts of " Jai Kalee ! " on the part of the robbers, while the inmates of the house cried, " Hur Hur Mahadev ! " In this time of terror and confusion it happened that the lamp was knocked down by one of the spears ; and the struggle continued in the darkness, and the air was filled with the groans of the

wounded and the exclamations of the fighters, nor could it be known what was taking place. Then Kesho called out to bring in torches, and so after a while light was again obtained. The fight was now soon concluded; and the victory of Kesho was to be seen. On his side Kesho himself was wounded on the shoulder, but not grievously, though blood was flowing. One of his men lay dead with a bullet through his heart, and three more had wounds from spears, and many had received blows. On the other side Rambux and Kalidass were dead, Ramchuran had received three severe wounds, and whether he would live or die was not known. The sowkar's son was lying senseless from a blow on the head, and his two brothers, who had sustained some lesser injuries, were held down by Kesho's men. Devidass himself was securely pinioned, but he had no hurt. Such was this terrible conflict. That the men of the household fought with bravery cannot be denied; and herein only this dacoity differed from many another, for to meet with such resistance is an unusual thing. The victims for the most part, though not always,

consider that wisdom lies in flight and concealment.

Then when the confusion was abated Kesho gave orders that a court of judgment should be held to deal out justice to Devidass. The money-lender was bound to one of the wooden pillars that supported the roof; and seven of Kesho's men took their places in a half-circle while Kesho stood in the midst, and thus addressed the miserable prisoner:

"The charge against you, Devidass, sowkar of Bagiwadi, is that being devoid of shame and filled with covetousness, you have oppressed the poor, and ruined my people by robbing them of their money and their lands, so that they have been reduced to extremity while you have waxed fat. Lending a little money you have exacted exorbitant interest, so that while they have many times over repaid the amount of the sums borrowed they are still hopelessly entangled in your debt. What have you to say to this accusation?"

"This slave is at your mercy," replied Devidass. "Should I not receive interest for the favours that I have done the people by advancing rupees?

Is not my interest moderate? Did they not live by means of my money in the years of famine?"

"Listen to this lying hound!" said Kesho. "Is it not his trade to advance money to cultivators, and tide them over years of scarcity? Should he not receive reasonable interest, so that both benefit? But this son of a pig, who has eaten up house and home of many a good man and caused his ruin, would make parade of his virtue! Answer me this, thou rapacious sowkar, how much didst thou advance to Govindram and how much hast taken from him?"

"If I see my books I can reply," said Devidass.

"Thou knowest without seeing thy lying books that he received from thee three hundred rupees, and had paid thee more than twelve hundred, and it is made to appear that there is still a debt of five hundred. Is this so?"

"It may be so, since it is so affirmed," answered Devidass.

And Kesho asked him about the transactions of other cultivators; and Devidass could not deny.

"How many years hast thou lived here?" continued Kesho.

"It may be five and twenty," was the reply.

"What money didst thou possess when thou camest here?"

"I cannot speak from memory; if I be permitted to see my books——"

"Thou knowest well without these books of falsehood that there were scarce a hundred rupees in thy possession. And now look at this spacious house built from the tears of the poor! Look at that safe stuffed with moneys that thou hast extorted! Where is the key of the safe?"

The key was soon produced, and Kesho with his own hand took out bag after bag of silver and gold coins, and ornaments, jewels, and precious stones that were worth the ransom of a king.

"Shahbash!" said Kesho. "This is a great day for the poor; and there will be a suitable offering to Mother Kalee. But let it not be said that justice has not been done. Is this man," he asked his followers, "guilty or not guilty of the offence?"

"He is guilty," exclaimed one and all.

"Thou hast heard the finding of the punch (jury)," said Kesho. "Listen now to the award of the court. I might hang thee to a tree, but the punishment shall be more bitter. Thou shalt live, dishonoured and poor. First shall all thy books and mortgages and papers be burnt. The silver coins shall be distributed to the men whom thou hast robbed; the gold coins and the ornaments will be the reward of my men, and an offering to Kalee. And for the sign of thy abasement thou shall lose thy nose, that all men shall scoff and say, 'This is the dog Devidass, the eater up of the poor, on whom Kesho did justice.'"

"Jai Kalee, Kesho Naik ki jai!" shouted the men, while they rapidly executed the sentence. The books were first hurled out into the compound and set fire to; the gold coins and the ornaments were then secured, and the silver was distributed among Govindram and his friends, who received many hundred rupees each. And then with a sharp knife the sowkar's nose was cut away, and he understood that this was worse than many deaths.

"There is one word more," said Kesho to his

band. "Go, search the whole house, and if there be any men found hiding let these cowards be well beaten, but on the women lay not hands."

This too was done; and many shrieks arose as the blows were inflicted. Then Kesho said, "It is time to be going; something has been achieved."

Now the Police who had by Kesho's deception been beguiled away, had by this time returned, very angry at having been cheated. And coming to the town they saw the glare from the fire of books and papers; and heard the shouts of many people. Then they proceeded cautiously to find out what was taking place, for they began to perceive into what a trap they had fallen. As they turned the corner of a street and came into view of the money-lender's house they were assailed by a shower of stones from three of Kesho's men, who had been placed thus to repel any who might interfere with his arrangements. And hearing shouts of "Kesho Naik," they knew that this was a time to consider safety, and they waited in dark corners until there should be an end of this zoolum.

So much have I, Krishna, with great difficulty

set forth. What remains to be said needs but few words. Kesho and his men returned unmolested to their hiding-place at the ruined temple, though the men who had been wounded could proceed but slowly, and their journey took many days. Govindram undertook to carry out the funeral ceremonies of the man who had been killed. There was great rejoicing in Bagiwadi and the surrounding villages that Kesho had done justice; and his name became great. And Kesho built a temple to Kalee.

The Police, for their part, when it was seen that the robbers had departed came running up to the house of Devidass, and called out bravely, "Where are the thieves? Where are the thieves?"

And Hyder Khan, the head-constable, wrote this report to his sub-inspector, who was away on inspection duty:

"The petition of Hyder Khan, head-constable, Class II. This humble one with the other Police of Bagiwadi was led away by false report of dacoity last night. On returning to Bagiwadi it was found that a gang of desperate robbers were making

dacoity in the house of Devidass, sowkar of tish place. We Police instantly attacked the dacoits, and wounded several and killed one. The dacoits being many in numbers escaped, after looting money and burning account-books. They also killed two men, and cut off the nose of Devidass. All of us Police have received severe wounds, but we fought with unexampled courage. Our promotion may be recommended. Half of us are going in pursuit of the offenders, and the remainder will stay here to restore confidence. More will be known upon arrival here.

"The signature of Hyder Khan,

"Head-constable, Class II."

CHAPTER V

KESHO NAIK PRESUMES TO ATTEND THE DURBAR OF THE WAR LORD-SAHIB

As the days went on the name of Kesho became very great. To his daring there was no limit, and the things that he did were so passing belief that in truth if I, Krishna, should write down even the half it would be said that I have dipped the pen of honesty into the ink of untruthfulness. Yet if Trench Sahib has put upon me this obligation to continue in the path which I have entered, how can I refuse to fulfil what has been prescribed in my destiny? But the burden is no easy one, for Kesho was not engaged merely in robberies and dacoities concerning which it were less difficult to write, nor were his operations confined to any one district. But he was north and south and east and west for hundreds of miles.

In what I have now to write there is this satisfaction, that the story is not long and the labour

will therefore be less. Nor indeed can what Kesho did in this instance be imputed to him as a crime; but from it will be seen the audacity of the man to whom, as I have said, in the whole world there was no equal.

Now Kesho was uneducated and could neither read nor write. But of this, that, and the other he had much knowledge; and of all things that were happening his information was complete. And for a man who was a dacoit and an outlaw this custom was strange that he should by his order receive many "khubber ka kaghuz," or as the Sahibs say, newspapers. As time went on, men of education, Mahrattas and even Brahmins, joined his band, though how a Brahmin should serve a Koli who can say? and these would read out the papers to him. Thus he was aware what officers were appointed and what laws were to be made. And when he had these things read out he would laugh and say, "Why is not Kesho's name included in the gazette, and why is his law not proclaimed?" for it pleased Kesho to laugh and to jest.

There was one man, a Brahmin named Balaji, who had been in the college at Somapur, but who

had no taste for a peaceable life, whom Kesho used to call his sherishtedar, or head clerk; and this Balaji was often set to read out the newspaper. And one day Balaji read this, that on the fifteenth day there was to be a great Durbar at Bombay, when the Burra Sahibs and also native chiefs would be given audience of the War Lord-Sahib (commander in-chief), who was to come from Simla. And many things were printed concerning the War Lord-Sahib, and how in many countries he had defeated the enemies of the Sirkar. And Kesho said, "It is good. I too will receive audience and see this man."

Then Balaji was amazed in his mind, and he thought to himself, "What mad jest is this? Surely Kesho knows that this thing may not be. For he will be seized and hanged if he show himself in such a place." But what kind of Brahmin is it who has not a fitting reply at the end of his tongue? So he hid his thoughts, and he folded his hands and said,

"Namuskar Maharaj," for now they were calling him Maharaj, "my compliments to your highness; this is indeed a good word. Your honour's name should become great, but to us

humble ones it is not known how this matter of the Durbar shall be accomplished."

"Many things there are which are not known to you humble ones," said Kesho. "At the right time all shall be disclosed." For to no one did Kesho say aught until he chose to do so. Then he dismissed his attendants.

For some days nothing was said about the Durbar; but Kesho was considering in his heart, and in the end he devised a plan by which he might carry out his design. Then, being mightily pleased with his invention, he called for Balaji the Brahmin, Jiwan the railway servant, and two others of his most trusted followers, and to them he unfolded something, though not all, and he gave instructions to make arrangements.

Many Rajahs and Chiefs were invited to the Durbar, and some were going willingly for the sake of their reputation, but others less willingly because the expense was heavy. And one who was to go was Baji Rao, the Chief of the State of Roha, which place was on the mountains that are called the Sahyadris or Western Ghauts. This man had led a retired life, having never left

the limits of his State; and it was only lately that upon his father's death he had become Chief. In age he was the same as Kesho; and it may be said that in appearance he was very like him, only that he was of somewhat more austere countenance, and did not smile and jest like Kesho.

"I will receive audience of the War Lord-Sahib as Baji Rao of Roha," said Kesho, while his attendants stood round him.

"Of a truth this is a good word," said one; and "Who but Kesho could think of this?" said another, though their liver became water when they considered the matter; and they perceived that this was no jest, but that the purpose stood firm.

Let it be understood that on the part of Baji Rao these arrangements were made. He sent a letter to the political agent who lived at Somapur that he was filled with gratitude at the condescension of the Sirkar, who had summoned such a humble well-wisher to the Durbar, and in accordance with the honour that had been conferred upon him he would pay his respects to the presence. Then he gave orders that a special saloon should be provided for him and his attendants at Ralne,

the railway station nearest to his dominions. This Ralne was thirty miles by a rough road from Roha. The train for Bombay passed the station at nine o'clock in the morning, and the saloon would be attached to it. The political agent would be in the train. Baji Rao arranged to arrive at Ralne the evening before, and sleep in the saloon. The time for the train to reach Bombay was eleven o'clock, and the Durbar was appointed for two ; so there was sufficient leisure for making ready after arrival. And two carriages with two horses each were to be ready at the station at Bombay ; and accommodation was engaged in the town for refreshment after the journey, and the putting on of robes and jewels for the Durbar.

At Roha meanwhile there was much excitement, and everyone belonging to the Chief's palace was required to do so much work in one day as in quiet times he would not complete in a month. For that the Chief of Roha should attend the Durbar was a new thing ; and more especially that Baji Rao had but lately succeeded to the gadi, or as the Sahibs would say, the throne, it was determined to display all the ceremony that was

possible for the reputation of the State. For the Chief's own wearing, robes of precious fabric were prepared, and there was great bustle of tailors and puggri-makers and perfumers; and the State jewels were brought out of their cases and cleaned and polished, and fine uniform and equipments for the Chief's followers were ordered from Bombay. Now it is known that though an elephant is a beast that eats his fill of sugar-cane and bread, and that in the keeping of one elephant there is the maintenance of thirty men, yet be the treasury of the State never so empty the Chief must for his reputation possess one or more elephants. Baji Rao owned one elephant only, but this one was in stature so great, in appearance so magnificent, and in temperament so equable, that the like thereof might hardly be found. And it was decided that this elephant should be sent to Bombay, and Baji Rao by riding thereon to the Durbar should achieve reputation in the eyes of the Sirkar, and the number of guns in his salute should be increased by one if not more. The elephant therefore was sent beforehand.

It was well known that Baji Rao was a man of

great sanctity, and a supporter of religion. He had caused to be built a spacious dhuramshala, or rest-house, where holy men from any city or country who visited Roha might take up their quarters and perform their devotions without hindrance. And on days that were sacred he used to order that they should be given food; and he was pleased to converse with any that were of special reputation, and listen to their ministrations. Now it so happened that three days before the departure to Ralne there arrived an aged priest, who had travelled on foot all the way from Kashi (Benares). Although a Hindoo he had suffered his beard to grow; and it was long, and white as milk. His garments were of white without any admixture of colour. His hair was knotted in small knots, and dexterously wound round his head; and he wore several necklaces of stones, each as large as a young mango. In one hand he held a lota of Ganges water which had this property, that if any of it were used in the day it was replenished of itself at night; and in the other hand he bore a brass plate of sacred ashes. This man used to pass his time in contemplation and

the recital of shlokas; and for his food he ate grains of millet, taking one grain only at a time. The first day he remained silent, and conversed with none, nor made answer to any questions. The second day in the morning there seemed to be uneasiness in his mind, but still he remained silent. At noon he walked to the palace of Baji Rao, and seeing him in the courtyard giving decisions and passing orders, without asking leave or permission of anyone he went and stood before him. He made no salaam or obeisance as was customary, so that all were surprised, and thought that Baji Rao would be angered. But he said quietly:

"What is there that should be said?"

"There is a journey intended?" asked the priest.

"I go to Bombay to-morrow to the Durbar," said Baji Rao.

"Thou goest not," said the priest, "until the third day." And all were amazed.

"The third day!" exclaimed the Chief. "The Durbar is on the second day, and the going cannot be deferred."

"Thou goest not until the third day," repeated the old man, "save at thy peril. The signs forbid

this going. The sacred ashes have burnt bright instead of smouldering. The Ganges water has overflowed the vessel. And the planet Angurak (Mars) is in the ascendant. Those three things foretell the death of a prince who travels before the third day. And Mother Gunga (Ganges) has directed my poor steps hither to thee, whose name I have not heard until now; but mistake not the message which Gunga in her kindness has sent to thee in recompense for the good work that thou hast done."

And without a word or a sign the priest walked away.

Then Baji feared greatly, for he reverenced Mother Gunga and the gods. And he sent for the priest to come again, but he was silent and could not be persuaded. So at last Baji Rao went to the dhuramshala, and threw himself on the ground before him. And he asked if there were no way by which he might go to the Durbar and yet escape his destiny. But the holy man said:

"Thou mayest not go."

Upon this Baji Rao's mind was fixed. And he called his men and countermanded all the preparations; and he sent a messenger to Ralne to

despatch telegrams to the Sirkar at Bombay and the political agent at Somapur that by his misfortune he was dangerously ill and could not attend the Durbar. And the messenger was to give word that the saloon would not be required for the train. Then the priest went away; and he followed the messenger and overtook him, and he offered to relieve him of his task. The messenger was glad to be spared the journey, and he gave the papers to the priest. And the priest, who was Kesho, laughed, and said to himself, "This is a good tamasha!"

In the night Kesho came to Ralne, and he rested till the morning in a house where three or four of his men, who by his order had made great preparations, were awaiting him. When the sun had risen he despatched the telegrams regarding Baji Rao's illness to Bombay and to Somapur, and he inquired of the station-master about the saloon, and said that the Chief and his followers would arrive in the evening. All that day they were making merry, and putting on fine clothes that had been prepared for this occasion. For Kesho had much money from the bars of gold,

and no expense was spared in the purchase of apparel and jewels. In the evening word was sent to the station-master that Baji Rao and his retinue were in the village and wished to occupy the saloon, and that the lamps should be lighted. Then they walked to the station, wearing good clothes such as a Rajah might wear, and yet not so rich as should be worn at a Durbar ; and they stayed that night in the saloon. The next morning at nine o'clock the train for Bombay drew up at the platform, and the saloon was attached to it. Kesho had given a present of gold embroidery to the station-master ; and he was pleased, and made salaam respectfully to Kesho as the train moved away. Food was taken in the train, so that time should not be spent on eating in Bombay, for Kesho had some intention in his mind. And when they arrived at Bombay, Kesho and his men sat in the two fine carriages that were in readiness, and they had with them packages of clothes and other things ; and they were driven to the house that had been engaged for Baji Rao. Here the State elephant was standing in readiness for them. Now it

might be thought that regarding the elephant there would be great difficulty, for the mahout or driver was well acquainted with Baji Rao, and he could not think that Kesho was in fact his Chief. Nor could any other driver be engaged, for an elephant may be guided by his own mahout and by no other. But to Kesho there was nothing that was difficult. Bidding the man descend from the neck of the elephant where he was perched, he spoke privately to him. He gave him a hundred rupees in a bag, and promised him more if he did his work and asked no questions. He explained that Baji Rao was ill and could not come, and that he himself was to occupy his position for the day. Furthermore he gave him this threat, that unless he consented he would die in seven days. The mahout thus was helpless; and moreover he had in his life never before seen a hundred rupees at one time. He therefore obeyed.

Then Kesho said to his men:

"We will visit the whole city, and the people shall see something. There is full time before the Durbar." And they went into the house, and they put on such rich garments and ornaments

that anyone would say, " This must be an emperor and his diwans." Now there was remaining two hours before Kesho should be present at the residence of the Burra Sahib where the Durbar should take place. And Kesho and four of his men climbed on to the elephant by the ladder that was let down. It was seldom that in Bombay there should be any riding of an elephant ; and an elephant such as this had never been seen. The animal itself was a Bahadur among elephants ; and its caparisons were embroidered with gold, and gleamed with rubies and other precious stones, and almost swept the ground. And the howdah in which they were sitting had pillars of gold to support the roof, which also was of gold ; and from the trappings were suspended silver bells which tinkled as the elephant moved. A great crowd was assembled to see this wonderful sight. Then the elephant moved on with slow and graceful movement of its limbs ; and the crowd, as crowds will do, followed the elephant, and all the roads were blocked with people struggling to keep in sight of this unusual spectacle. And some asked " Who is this Rajah ? "

and the word went forth that this is Baji Rao of Roha ; and the people shouted, " Baji Rao ki jai, Baji Rao ki jai." And Kesho was greatly pleased, and he threw silver pieces to the crowd, and they shouted all the more " Baji Rao ki jai." " A great tamasha is this ! " said Kesho ; and his men said, " It is a great tamasha," but in truth they feared lest it should be known that this is not Baji Rao, but Kesho Naik the outlaw. But to Kesho no fear was known. In this way then they traversed many great thoroughfares ; and the Police people were angered that the crowds blocked the streets, and they began to beat the people. But Kesho bade them desist, else he would report them ; so they left off beating.

Now was the time to go to the Durbar, so Kesho gave the order to proceed to the hall of audience. As they drew near, the roads were filled with carriages taking officers and sirdars to the Durbar, and it was necessary to go slowly, and in order. And it so chanced that the elephant was close to a carriage in which with other Sahibs was seated Trench Sahib. And the Sahibs looked at the elephant, and they asked " Who is this great man

riding on an elephant ? " And they learnt that it was Baji Rao, the Chief of Roha. And Trench said, " His face reminds me of someone whom I have seen, but I cannot call to mind who it may be." So they came to the Durbar hall ; and the elephant knelt down, and all descended, but Kesho was to go alone into the Durbar, while his men stood by the elephant. And they said, " What will be done when the dacoit makes salaams to the Sirkar ? " But Kesho was quietly entering the waiting-hall, as he saw other men enter, and he gave his name to the men-in-waiting as Baji Rao of Roha ; and they let him in. It wanted now but a few minutes to the time of audience ; and the waiting-hall was packed with English officers and Hindoo, Mahometan, and Parsee notables. Then the great door of the Durbar hall was flung open, and the people began to enter. And the manner of proceeding was on this wise. Each gentleman on entering gave a card on which was printed his name and dignity to an English officer. And Kesho gave his card—Baji Rao, Chief of Roha. Then the officer said :

" A telegram came that your Highness was ill,

and unable to attend. It is satisfactory that after all there has been recovery from the indisposition."

"By the favour of the Sahib," said Kesho, "this humble one has always enjoyed good health; and nothing is known of this telegram. Some enemy must have been doing some mischief."

"Neither has Your Highness's political agent come," said the Sahib, "for he also sent a telegram that he had heard of the illness."

"This must be the work of an enemy," said Kesho, "but by the favour of the Sahib I may be permitted to make obeisance."

So he was permitted; and it is to be said that for his own purpose Kesho had let all others enter first, and had himself remained till the last. Each of the others had been striving to enter as soon as he might. Then Kesho walked slowly, and as it were proudly, through the great hall till he came to the presence. There another officer asked for a card, and Kesho gave it; for he knew of the custom. Then the Burra Sahib of Bombay held out his hand, and Kesho took it, and again he answered questions about his health and the telegram. And the Burra Sahib of Bombay

introduced him to the War Lord-Sahib from Simla, and said that Baji Rao had lately succeeded to the gadi. And Kesho saw that the War Lord-Sahib was indeed a mighty Sahib, for with his head uncovered he was taller than Kesho, even with his high puggri, it might be said by a cubit. And in his eyes was the fire of power. Then was Kesho pleased in his heart that he had joined hands with such a man. But he had, as I have written, in his mind a purpose. And he bowed low, and made obeisance, and he said:

"I have a request to make to the presence."

And seeing that no more were to come, and that the Durbar was completed, the Burra Sahib said:

"What is the request?"

"This is the request of this humble one," said Kesho, "that by the favour of the Sirkar all is well in Roha. But there is this thing, that there is an outlaw of British Territory who is troubling my State, and robbing and plundering the poor. His name is Kesho Naik. He has no fear of God or man. And it is a strange thing," continued Kesho, smiling, "that people say he is in appearance like this humble one. And this is my

petition that white soldiers be sent to protect my State." Such a man was Kesho Naik.

Then the two Sahibs spoke with one another, and the War Lord-Sahib said :

"The place is good for the exercise of a mountain topkhana (battery)."

And the Burra Sahib of Bombay gave consent to Kesho's petition. Then Kesho took leave of the presence ; and he mounted his elephant, and was conveyed away. And he said to his men on the elephant, "This is a great tamasha ! What shall be the end of it ? "

What at last was the end who may now say ? But this was the beginning, that on the seventh day Baji Rao of Roha awoke in the morning to see a battery of mules and guns, and two companies of white soldiers drawn up in front of his palace. And he was in great fear, for he said, "This is the punishment of the Sirkar that I did not attend the Durbar. Something terrible must be intended." For never before had white soldiers, or indeed any of the Sirkar's soldiers, been seen at Roha. Then while the two companies and the battery with the guns upon the mules were

drawn up in a line like a wall in full view of the palace, the officer of the battery, who could speak our language, advanced, and asked to speak with the Chief. And Baji Rao was trembling with fear, but he went to meet the Sahib, and he made salaam, and the Sahib in return gave him salute, and ordered the soldiers to present arms. And Baji Rao on seeing the rifles in the flash of an eye all move in one fashion was more frightened, for he thought, "Now will they shoot." But there was no shooting, and the officer said:

"There is this messsage from the Sirkar. The Sirkar sends compliments to the Rao Sahib, and offers congratulations on his accession to the gadi; and the request that was made at the Durbar is fulfilled. The guns of the Rao Sahib's salute are also increased by one. Orders may now be given where we shall find this outlaw, by name Kesho Naik, of whom complaint was made."

So great was the astonishment of Baji Rao that for a time he was silent. Then he said:

"The favour of the Sirkar is great. But owing to ill health I was not present at the Durbar; and telegrams were sent concerning the indisposi-

tion. It is not known what was this request nor is there any word of Kesho Naik."

"Not present at the Durbar?" said the officer in extreme surprise. "Why, everyone was admiring the Chief of Roha who came on the magnificent elephant; and there was conversation between the Chief and the Burra Sahib and the War Lord-Sahib. The request was for white soldiers to protect the State from one Kesho Naik." So saying he turned and gave orders to the soldiers to dismiss and take food and rest. But Baji Rao's liver became water, for the words were without meaning; and he understood that there had befallen him a great misfortune which must have been caused by an unfavourable deity. And he said, "I must have committed a sin in a former existence that this evil should overtake me." And he became ill for many days.

In the crowd of grooms and tent-pitchers and others who were attending on the soldiers there was a poor man in mean clothing. And, being alone he laughed, and said, "This is a good tamasha!" Such a man was Kesho Naik. And this story was not so short in the telling as I, Krishna, had thought.

CHAPTER VI

KESHO NAIK PLUNDERS A TREASURY AND KIDNAPS A MAGISTRATE

By-and-by it become known in the bazaars how Kesho Naik had gone to the Durbar, and all people began to talk about this wonderful thing. The old men said, " Shiwaji has come again and what will be will be." The young men were inflamed in their minds, and said, " This man is a Bahadur among men," and many of them went to join his band, for they were filled with emulation. Some he kept with him, and to others he said, " When the time comes I will call you. Go home now, and practise exercises with clubs; and if with guns then let it be as it may be." And when the women were making their babes sleep in the swinging cots in the hot afternoons they would tell them stories of Kesho Naik until they slept.

In the course of time it became known to the Burra Sahib of Bombay that this was not Baji Rao of Roha who had come on the elephant to the Durbar, but Kesho Naik the outlaw. And what people were saying was this, though whether it be the fact or otherwise I, Krishna, do not rightly know, that when the Burra Sahib heard of the trick that had been played on him, and the sending of the white soldiers to one who desired nothing so much as never to see a soldier, he laughed so that his officers feared lest he should suffer some illness. And when he had to an extent recovered, so that his speech again came to him, he said, " This man should be among my officers, for such cleverness I have never seen." But when the whole history of Kesho's doings was related to him he was forced, though against his will, to be angry ; and he issued proclamations for the taking of this rebel, and he offered rewards of five thousand rupees for his capture. This in the end was told to Kesho ; and he was vexed that the sum put upon him was only five thousand rupees. And he said, " I will show what a man is worth." And for the taking of the Burra Sahib

he put a reward of fifty thousand rupees, and for other officers twenty thousand and ten thousand. He caused his proclamations to be written in four languages; and he had copies posted up on the walls of the hall of audience in Bombay. This too led to much talking; and the circumstances were printed in the newspapers and read out to Kesho. Then was he greatly pleased, and he said, "I too will have a newspaper printed with full gazette." This intention indeed he fulfilled; and the newspaper was made with some rough contrivance, and copies were sent to the Burra Sahib. In this he caused to be written the circumstances of the Durbar; and also the reward for taking the Burra Sahib and other officers.

Now Kesho was such an one that he never forgave any who had affronted him, and one day he said to his men, "Something must be done to fill the gazette. I will see that man Trimbuk, the magistrate at Diksal. This was the fool who addressed me, Kesho, as 'Accused number one.' He shall learn who is accused number two. Then there will be something for the gazette; and the Burra Sahib shall hear of it." It is to

be explained that among us people the saying that " I will see you " signifies that " I will have revenge upon you." And when Kesho said that he would see Trimbuk it was understood that some great thing was intended. And Kesho notified that owing to the Durbar, let alone the giving to the poor, there had been great expenses, and there was need of money, for his treasury was becoming empty. So he made a plan to see Trimbuk which should also replenish the treasury. This was like the saying of the Sahibs that with one stone there shall be killed two birds.

It is known that in the jurisdiction of the Sirkar a magistrate is also an officer of revenue ; and he has a treasury in which are many rupees, more or less according to the circumstances of the country. In each zillah (district) there is a great treasury at the Civil Station with many lakhs of rupees and stamps and opium, and it may be ten or twelve smaller treasuries at other places. And in the treasury of Trimbuk at Diksal there were perhaps thirty thousand rupees at one time. These were all in silver, and for the same value the weight of silver is fifteen times greater than that

of gold. Thus, though to remove so great a prize as was the gold in the train might not be considered, something less had to be done, but still something. And this custom was in force. While on the one side into the treasuries were paid land-taxes and other revenues, on the other side much payment was made from them for the needs of the Sirkar, it may be for the making of canals or other works, or for the pay of officers and servants month by month. And so in one treasury there might be an overflow, and in another something less; and from one to another the treasure was exchanged from time to time as the great officers of the Sirkar might order. And thousands of rupees were often sent about the country with a party of Police to guard them. Now if Kesho and his band had on some occasion descended upon such an escort of treasure in a jungle road, as a cheetah swoops upon a herd of deer, and had beaten the Police and seized rupees, it might not have been of special wonder. But the intention of Kesho was greater than any such thing.

Among the Brahmins who had joined Kesho's

band was one Rambhao who had once been a karkoon, or clerk, in the service of the Government. He had been employed in treasuries, and was therefore acquainted with all the ways in which the work was carried on. That this man had been dismissed for his bad behaviour there is no necessity to write; for excepting some youths of hot blood, but without knowledge or experience, there was no educated man with Kesho save such as had been broken for some offence. This Rambhao was now employed by Kesho to arrange all the details of the scheme which he had devised. "Twelve thousand rupees," said Kesho, "is the price that this ill-fated one shall pay for his 'accused number one.'" And he made a calculation that by the means which should be used one man might for some distance carry twelve hundred rupees, the weight of which would be something less than twenty seers, or forty pounds. Thus by collecting ten men the total of twelve thousand rupees would be conveyed. That there were many difficulties to be encountered is not to be denied; but Kesho had no care for a lakh of difficulties.

And the more preparations that had to be thought of beforehand the better was he pleased, for craft and deceit were to him as the breath of life ; and if many days passed in making arrangements this again to him mattered nothing.

In the first place Kesho himself with Rambhao and Jiwan went to Lolapur in the guise of respectable merchants. They engaged a room in the city, and they frequented the bazaars and markets, asking the price of this and that, and making some purchases of ordinary goods, so that no suspicion might be aroused. This however was but a blind and pretence, for in fact other things were from day to day being secretly obtained, and by degrees, first a little and then some more, these were despatched by the train to Lukhipur, the station not far from Pimpalwada, this being the nearest station to Diksal. Thence they were removed by other of Kesho's men and kept at the place where they would be required when the occasion arrived. At length all such arrangements were completed ; and Kesho and Rambhao and Jiwan had a feast in their room. Rambhao and Jiwan drank

liquor, but Kesho could neither at this time nor any other be persuaded to partake of aught but water or, it may be, milk. The next morning Kesho departed, for he had to be busy elsewhere ; but the other two were left at Lolapur for three days to carry out instructions.

When these days had passed, Jiwan, as Kesho had ordered, wearing the dress of a chuprassi, or messenger of the Government, went to the telegraph office to send a tar by the stretched wires to Diksal. For though there was no railway at Diksal, yet the poles and the lightning wires had been carried to that place. On the brass plate upon the belt which Jiwan wore over his right shoulder there was engraved in English and in our language, "Hoozoor Deputy Collector." This was the designation of the officer in charge of the great treasury. In wearing this dress and this brass plate there was some risk incurred, for a messenger or other person actually employed in the treasury might have met Jiwan and said, "Who is this impostor?" But by the good fortune of Kesho nothing happened on the way. Only at the telegraph office the clerk looked at

Jiwan and said, "Are you a new man?" and he replied without any more words, "Yes, I am newly appointed." Then the clerk seeing his badge was satisfied, and despatched the message, for indeed there was nothing strange or unusual in it, many such being sent. The message had been written by Rambhao, who knew the procedure, and it was in English in these words:—

"From the Hoozoor Deputy Collector,
Lolapur,
"25th March.

"To the officer in charge of the Treasury at Diksal.

"Twelve thousand rupees are to be sent from your treasury to Lolapur. They should be packed and ready for despatch by the morning of the 27th. As it is understood that the Police at Diksal are below strength on account of sickness and special duty, a Police guard will be sent from head quarters to escort the treasure. The guard will reach Diksal on the evening of the 26th."

It was customary upon the despatch of a

telegram of this nature to send a letter by post confirming the order. This too was not neglected. Rambhao had obtained a rubber seal marked "Office of Huzoor Deputy Collector, Lolapur," and with this he made an impression at the top of the letter, which was written, as is the rule, in our language. He signed the letter with the signature of an officer at some distant place, so that Trimbuk should not take suspicion at the signature being unlike the usual one, and he should merely think that a new officer had come. There was one more thing also that Kesho had ordered; and a private telegram was sent to Trimbuk, as from his wife Dewbai at Lolapur, to tell him that their daughter Sita was dangerously ill and he should come at once. It may now be written that when Trimbuk received this message he was distraught, and he sent a telegram to the collector that he might be granted a week's leave on urgent private affairs. This leave was granted; and the sanction arrived on the evening of the 26th. So Trimbuk was prepared to set off the first thing in the morning. Thus then on the part of Rambhao and Jiwan the work was completed,

and they went away by the train. If in this writing there have been many words I may be excused; for the order was that I should write neither less nor more, but each thing exactly as it occurred.

On the evening of the 26th of March, when it was growing dark, there marched into the cutcherry at Diksal the Police guard which should escort the treasure to Lolapur. There was one head-constable and four constables. And the head-constable went to the office of Trimbuk the magistrate to report the arrival and to give "all well." But Trimbuk had left his office, although his work was incomplete, for his head was turning round at the news of his daughter's sickness so that he could not give attention to his duties. By this time also he had received the telegram regarding his leave, and some arrangements had to be made. The report was made to Trimbuk in his private house that the guard had come for the treasure, and it was requested that they might start at six o'clock in the morning, for the distance was great, being not less than twenty miles to Pimpalwada and eight miles on to Lukhipur.

Then Trimbuk gave the order for six o'clock; and he said, "I too will travel in the bullock-carts with the treasure." For this would save him some rupees in the hire of a cart for his conveyance to Lukhipur; and he was not a man to spend four annas when he might contrive to avoid so doing.

Now all this was the craft of Kesho; and how he could beforehand think out in his mind all that should happen is not to be understood unless in his designs he had the aid of devils and evil spirits. But for this how could he, even with money, obtain Police uniforms and guns, and how could he know Trimbuk to be such a man that he would certainly travel in the carts with the treasure? But all this and many other things he had considered. There was this too, that though he and his men could shoot with guns, they did not know how to hold them in military fashion, or to give salute with "present arms." And the Police of the place on seeing this might take suspicion; and again these Police, on perceiving that the men from head quarters were strangers whom they had never set eyes on before,

might be thinking something. For all such things was Kesho ready.

"Salaam, Havildar (Sergeant)," said Kesho, as he led his men to the guard-room, where was the head-constable in charge of the lock-up and treasury. This was not Ali Mahomed, who had been dismissed for the escape of Kesho on the former occasion, but a new man named Ramchundra. "Salaam, Havildar-ji; the guard has come to take the treasure in the morning. May the order be given for some food for us people who are dead with this long road; and permission to spread our bechana (bedding) in the verandah or such place as may be granted?"

"Be-shuk, certainly," said Ramchundra, as he directed one of his constables to procure rice and chupatties and chillies. "You may take your food here and sleep in the verandah afterwards. But how is it that your face does not come to my remembrance?"

"How should my face come to remembrance, Havildar-ji, seeing that I and the four sepoys with me are lately transferred to Lolapur from the Sarata district on account of vacancies in

Lolapur? In Sarata we were being sent hither and thither for month after month to seek for the ferari Kesho Naik; and our dress was in rags and our drill forgotten. And no sooner are we come to this district, and there is a call for special duty, than this Shaitan Vinayak, the sub-inspector of head quarters, must pitch upon us to come on this endless journey, through strange roads. Of a truth in the eating of the salt of the Sirkar there is much hardship. The work is the work of an elephant, and the reward is less than the pay of an ass. There is better treatment by this Kesho Naik to his servants."

"This is foolish talk," said Ramchundra, who was a quiet man. "What pension will Kesho give when a man has done his service?"

"The rebuke is just," said Kesho. "I spoke but at random, being oppressed by this marching. Yes, the pension is a great thing in old age; and it shall be my endeavour not to forfeit it by foolish words."

"Shahbash, it is well spoken," said Ramchundra. "Let not the word of intemperance blight the blossom of faithfulness. But here is

bread and rice. It shall not be said that Ramchundra was one to exact the price of hospitality from those who have eaten the salt of the Sirkar in Police service."

"The generosity of Ramchundra is become a proverb," said Kesho, who was quick to understand what was meant; "but these humble ones have not come unprovided, lest it should be said that they have taken advantage of the high-minded Bahadur."

After exchanging some more compliments, Ramchundra was persuaded to accept a rather more than sufficient recompense for the fare that was set before Kesho and his men; and they, who were accustomed to live well, could hardly disguise the distaste with which they managed to dispose of the unpalatable viands that were given to them.

Now that evening before it was dark the treasure was packed in canvas bags, each containing six hundred rupees, and these were placed in strong wooden boxes which were firmly secured and sealed. The boxes were loaded on two bullock-carts, though in truth one might have carried

the burden. But Trimbuk said, "Let there be two carts, for the way is a long one and kindness to the oxen is a good thing." Moreover he himself desired to travel in such comfort as might be. And the carts were kept close to the treasury guard during the night for the protection of the twelve thousand rupees.

Shortly after daybreak the bullocks were yoked to the carts with much shouting on the part of the drivers and some blows to the animals; and report was made to Trimbuk that all was ready for departure. Then he came from his house; and in one of the carts was placed much straw upon the boxes, and over this soft bedding and a coverlet for him to rest upon, and vessels containing food, and a chagli or leather bottle of water. And he was greatly troubled in his mind for his daughter Sita. As he arrived Kesho stood before him, and gave salaam and "all well," and he bade his men "present arms"; but the "present arms" that they gave with their guns was a strange sight. Trimbuk, however, was not troubling about such matters, and when he had settled himself upon his bedding he gave order

to proceed, and so they set off. Kesho was walking close beside the cart in which Trimbuk was seated, and he was waiting for the magistrate to speak, for a humble one must not address his superior officer until some word is said to him. At last Trimbuk placed in his mouth some pan supari, and chewed it; and when his lips were red from the betel nut his mind became more composed.

"What news is there at Lolapur?" he asked Kesho, when they had travelled two miles or so.

"By the favour of the Rao Sahib all is well at Lolapur," replied Kesho. "We are new men from Sarata, and know not the people and the doings at Lolapur. This was learnt that the treasury officer was a new man, but his name was not known to this humble one."

"Was there any talk of the movements of the Collector Sahib? Had he intention to bring his camp into these limits?"

"In truth," said Kesho, "this slave was awaiting the Rao Sahib's permission to speak. Yesterday the Collector Sahib's tents and horses were seen by us people on the road from Lukhipur to

Pimpalwada; and it was said that the Sahib was to come this morning."

"By Mahadev!" ejaculated the magistrate, "to come this morning? How can that be? I have had no word of this coming. Beware that you speak not idle vapourings."

"This humble one may be pardoned," said Kesho. "It is not known to us why there was no word of this coming. But our eyes have seen the carts laden with the tents and the equipage of the camp."

Then the magistrate was thoughtful, for he liked not a visit from the Burra Sahib until all things were ready for inspection; and he remembered that much work was unfinished in his office, and that for many things explanation would be called for. Moreover in his absence who might not tell tales against him? But Kesho wished to make him pleased, and since it was accorded to him to speak he beguiled the weariness of the way with agreeable conversation, so that the miles passed quickly. After some hours they had travelled a long distance, and were now within five miles of Pimpalwada. The

road was a solitary one, and there was thick jungle on each side. Now Kesho was narrating many things concerning the wickedness of Kesho Naik and his doings in the Sarata district. And he spoke of the zoolum that he had exercised, and the hardships that he had caused to the Police.

"Of a truth," said Trimbuk, "the man is a Shaitan, for he was here in the lock-up, and escaped; but I hope to meet him again and then there will be a reckoning."

"Be-shuk," said Kesho, "doubtless there will be a reckoning. Accused number two, hast thou aught to say?"

This he shouted in a voice of thunder. Trimbuk could not believe his own ears, but his liver became water, and he understood that some calamity had befallen him.

"Accused number two, hast thou aught to say?" shouted Kesho again, as he caused the carts to halt. The two drivers were amazed, but a man threatened each with a gun, and they were helpless. Then Kesho took off his uniform puggri; and Trimbuk saw that this was Kesho,

and he was in terror of his life. And he folded his hands and prayed for pardon.

"Pardon! thou shameless one," cried Kesho, "who hast dared to address me as 'accused number one'! Thou son of a vile father and a disgraceful mother; thou shalt see what pardon Kesho gives. The day of reckoning is come, and twelve thousand rupees are one part of the price. The other part is yet to be learnt."

Then Trimbuk became senseless with terror, and he descended from the cart and took off his puggri and threw himself at the feet of Kesho, and wept and howled for mercy that his life might be spared and his reputation saved. And Kesho laughed and gave him blows and kicks, and he said to his men, "Look at this son of a pig who robs the Sirkar with one hand and plunders the poor with the other, and is an eater of bribes and a seller of justice!" And he took scissors and clipped off his moustache, and he said, "Now art thou in mourning for thine own life." And Kesho would have made Trimbuk walk beside the cart, but the strength was gone from his limbs. So he and his men hoisted him

again upon the cart; and they continued their journey.

When they had proceeded about a mile, and Trimbuk was desperate on account of his evil fortune, and in great fear that his life would be taken—for all this time Kesho and his men were giving him mocks and threats—it was perceived that a horseman was approaching. And in a short time they all saw that it was an European Sahib. Then great joy came to the magistrate, for he recognised the Collector Sahib, and he thought, "Now shall I be delivered from this evil one." Kesho for his part did not know the Sahib by sight, never having seen him before, but he too understood that it must be the Burra Sahib because the tents had been seen on the road. And to himself he said, "This is good. Now shall we have a fine tamasha." And to Trimbuk he gave this threat, "If one word of this business is uttered, in a single instant I will shoot you and shoot the Sahib. Make report to the Sahib that you are escorting the treasure to Lolapur as ordered by the telegram."

Thus joy was changed to grief and terror in

Trimbuk's mind; and such was his plight that he knew not if he were alive or dead. And one moment he thought, "I will inform the matter to the Sahib, for this miscreant dare not touch the Sahib," and again he considered that there was nothing that this Shaitan would not dare to do and so his mind was being torn in two ways. By this time they had come close to the Sahib, and Kesho stopped the carts and gave orders to his men to "present arms," so they held up their guns in some fashion, and Kesho gave "all well," and made report that treasure was being taken to Lolapur. And he added, "The magistrate is sitting in the cart, but his temperament is disturbed by some bad news." Such a man was Kesho Naik.

The Sahib looked at the cart and the huddled-up figure and dejected countenance of the passenger, and was much surprised that this was the magistrate of Diksal.

"Why, Trimbuk," he said, "what is the matter with you? You look as if you had had a visit from Kesho Naik!"

The Sahib was little suspecting how true was

this surmise. As for Trimbuk, his torture was greater and greater. Now was the time to speak and so escape his fate. He summoned up all his courage, and after making salaam,

"Sir," he stammered out, "it is Kesho Naik——"

But then he perceived Kesho, as it were inadvertently, holding his gun pointed towards him, and the eye of Kesho was fixed upon him so that his marrow was dried up and his courage was gone. So he changed his words and said:

"Sir, it is Kesho Naik whose escape from the lock-up has loaded me with such anxiety that my health is ruined. How can I look at my officer when such a thing has happened in my division?"

"Yes, that was a bad business," said the Sahib, "but after all it was not your fault, so cheer up. You may find him again, and then there can be a reckoning."

Trimbuk was cursing softly in his heart, for how could he say that Kesho had found him, and the reckoning was the wrong way? And there were twelve thousand rupees of the Sirkar in the cart which were part of the reckoning. If the

miserable wretch could only explain! But there was Kesho's eye upon him, and there was the gun ready to shoot him with!

"Certainly, sir," he managed to gasp out, "I may find him again, and there will doubtless be a reckoning."

And Kesho said to himself, "This is a great tamasha."

Then the Collector turned to Kesho and said, "What Police are these who look as if they have never learnt their drill? Do you belong to Diksal?"

"By the favour of the Sahib," replied Kesho, "we are men of head quarters, but have only been recently transformed from Sarata, where we humble ones were pursuing this Kesho Naik, and our dress was spoilt and drill forgotten. If we could but light upon this Kesho we Police would be blessing our good fortune."

"Kesho again!" said the Collector to Trimbuk. "When *are* we to get hold of him? I am tired of hearing about him. I wish I could meet him myself."

If Trimbuk could but force himself to say that

the Collector's wish was in fact gratified, and that he had met Kesho himself! But there was that terrible eye fixed upon him, and the gun ready for shooting. And Kesho was saying, "This is a great tamasha!"

"Well, you had better get along," said the Collector. "By-the-by, whom are you in mourning for? I see you have shaved off your moustache."

"My father is dead since seven days," stuttered Trimbuk, whose father had been dead for years; "and misfortunes are great, for my daughter is dangerously ill. That is why I sent the telegram for the week's leave."

"I am very sorry, Trimbuk," said the Sahib. "I see you are in trouble. You can have ten days' leave for change of air. I hope you will find your daughter much better. Good-bye."

With these words he rode away: and Trimbuk knew that his fate must be accomplished. What his destiny was to be he was now soon to learn. About half a mile on there was a rough track leading into the jungle, and into this track Kesho turned the carts. Then Trimbuk began to weep and pray, for he understood that now some great

evil would happen. But he only received jeers and laughter. For it may be a mile the carts went along this rough path ; and when the jungle was very thick, behold there were eleven strong Deccan ponies saddled and five men were with them.

" Now," said Kesho, " do the work quickly," and as it was in an instant the two cart drivers were bound and gagged and left lying on the ground, and the boxes of treasure were smashed open, and the rupees placed in the saddle bags of ten of the ponies, one canvas bag of six hundred rupees on each side of each pony.

Trimbuk gazed at this spectacle with open eyes and open mouth ; but he was speechless with horror and consternation. And he was wondering why there was one pony without saddle bags. It was not long before his fate was made known to him.

" Sit on this pony, thou be-shuram, shameless one," said Kesho to the miserable wretch. And while he protested vainly that he could not ride they placed him in the saddle and tied him by ropes so that he could not fall off. Then all the

ten men mounted their ponies ; and one man was on either side of Trimbuk holding his pony by a strap. So they rode off, at first slowly because the jungle was thick, but where the country was open they went at a great pace, and were soon many miles away. And from time to time they shouted, " Kesho Naik ki jai, Kesho ki jai." Nor can I, Krishna, write concerning the state into which Trimbuk was now reduced. By sunset the party had come to rough hilly country with rocks and nullahs, and they had to ride slowly. And as it was growing dark there were seen lights and there were men holding torches at the entrance of a great cavern in the hill-side. All then dismounted and handed over the ponies to the men who were at the place and they entered the cavern, dragging Trimbuk along the ground. There they partook of food which was ready for them in a great cauldron; and afterwards they became merry. At last Kesho gave the word to unbind Trimbuk, and he bade him stand before him.

" Accused number two," roared Kesho, " hast thou aught to say ? "

But Trimbuk could make no reply, and he fell on his face before Kesho.

And they held a trial upon him, with witnesses ; and in the end this order was passed, that for six months he should undergo imprisonment. And in fact for one month they kept him with them, hiding him in different caves and secret places. Then Kesho became tired of this tamasha and one day he beat Trimbuk soundly and then dismissed him.

This is one of the daring and terrible things that I, Krishna, had to write about Kesho, and if it be said, " How could such a thing be done ? " how shall I make answer ? How such things could be done was known only to Kesho, whose equal there has never been. And he caused this to be printed in his gazette.

" Trimbuk the magistrate of Diksal is sentenced to six months' imprisonment for eating bribes and oppressing the poor ; and for deserting his post and losing twelve thousand rupees of the Sirkar he is dismissed his post.

" By order of Kesho Naik."

CHAPTER VII

TRENCH SAHIB PURSUES KESHO NAIK, BUT IS HIMSELF MADE PRISONER

If it was my destiny that I, Krishna, should record how Kesho Naik, by craft and guile, stole twelve thousand rupees from the Sirkar's treasury at Diksal, how should I make refusal, notwithstanding that the burden was a heavy one, and hardly to be borne? Yet what I now have to write concerning this audacious one is a thousand times more difficult; and even as is an elephant in comparison with a gnat in such degree is this work harder than what has gone before. But the order was given to this humble one to set forth the evil doings of this prince of rogues to whom there is known no equal in the whole world; and in truth the task when it has been commenced may not be left before completion. And this is my fear that what I write may

not be believed; and I shall be held to have woven the web of fancy rather than have unravelled the threads of reality.

This is the beginning of the circumstances that were now to occur, and the confusion that was to arise. At noon on the day on which the treasure and the magistrate had departed from Diksal there came by post a letter from the officer of the great treasury at Lolapur to the treasury officer at Diksal; and this, in the absence of Trimbuk, was according to custom opened by his head clerk, whose name was Kashinath. And when Kashinath read the letter his head turned and his limbs refused their office, for in his whole life he had never sustained so terrible a shock. When he had to some extent come to his senses he at first thought that the letter must have been written by the folly of some witless one; but in the end he perceived that there had been the work of devils. For it was clearly seen that the signature to the letter was that of the usual officer and not of any stranger; and in the letter there was this order, that as the rupees in the Diksal treasury were too many, none having

been demanded for a long time, twenty thousand rupees should be sent on the third day to Lolapur, and that a guard should be supplied by the Police of Diksal. Thus from this and that it was understood that some calamity had been appointed. Then was there much talking and babbling, and calling on this one and the other.

"Arhe bapre!" said Kashinath to Ramchundra, the head-constable whom he had summoned before him, after abusing all the clerks in the office. "Bap re Bap! What word is this? Was not treasure handed over to the Police of head quarters for conveyance to Lolapur?"

"Without doubt," replied Ramchundra. "This morning was the treasure placed in charge of the guard, and receipt taken. But may this slave be informed what reason there is for this inquiry?"

"What reason! thou senseless one," roared the angry Kashinath. "Is there not an order now received from Lolapur asking for twenty thousand rupees? Is it not written that no remittance has been demanded for many days? No remittance demanded, when twelve thousand

rupees have been sent this very day in accordance with telegram and letter! What is this? What dost thou understand?"

"The telegram and the letter might be compared," answered the havildar, "to see if everything is correct." But he was disturbed in his mind that the Police from head quarters had not been known to him, and there came to him some doubt of their story. And he was troubled, for blame might come upon his own head.

Kashinath had already compared the telegram and the letter five or six times, but again he made examination in accordance with the advice of Ramchundra.

"All is in order," he said, "except one thing. That the signature on the first letter is that of a strange officer is not surprising, since God orders death and the Sirkar orders a transfer as the thunder springs from the cloud. In this matter there was no suspicion. But in the second letter there is the signature of our old officer."

"Wah, wah!" said Ramchundra. "In this there is some matter of surprise. May not a tar (wire) be sent to the treasury officer at Lolapur,

to clear the matter ?" For he had no mind to disclose the doubt which had come to him.

Then Kashinath despatched this message to Lolapur by the stretched wires.

"Your letter received. It is not understood how you state that no rupees have been demanded lately from Diksal, for in accordance with your telegram and letter of the 25th March twelve thousand rupees were to-day handed over to Police guard from head quarters for conveyances to Lolapur. Magistrate Trimbuk gone on leave by permission of Collector and travelled with treasure."

Then at Lolapur there was untold confusion, for it was at once understood that no such order had been sent, and also that no Police guard from head quarters had proceeded to Diksal. And they said, "This must be the villainy of Trimbuk and Kashinath!" Such a matter should be reported to the Collector Sahib for his orders; but the Sahib had himself taken his camp to that very place. At last the treasury officer sent this message to Diksal.

"Your telegram has filled me with astonishment. No order was sent for twelve thousand rupees; and no Police guard has gone to you from head quarters. There must be some villainy. Inquiries should be made, and report submitted to Collector whose camp is in your limits."

Upon receipt of this telegram the consternation at Diksal became greater.

"Thou son of an owl! Thou descendant of abominable ancestors!" shouted Kashinath to Ramchundra; "to whom hast thou handed over twelve thousand rupees of the Sirkar? Hast thou arranged this deception? Were these Police of head quarters thy brothers and thy foster-brothers? Speak, thou nimuk-haram, thou faithless one to thy salt!"

"This slave may be pardoned," replied Ramchundra humbly, "if there has been inadvertence. But the Rao Sahib himself sat on the cart with the treasure, and what cause was there for this humble one to suspect anything? It is for us to obey; and the order was to give the rupees in the charge of these Police."

"These Police!" thundered the head clerk; "these robbers, as it would seem! Didst know the men?"

"Of a truth their faces were not known; but they stated that their transfer had been made from Sarata, where they had been pursuing Kesho Naik."

"Kesho Naik!" roared Kashinath, "thou imbecile son of a stricken father! How knowest thou that it is not Kesho Naik to whom thou hast given twelve thousand rupees?" And he gave many abuses for a long time; but Ramchundra, who was a poor man, kept silence. But in his heart he said, "This must be Kesho Naik."

Thus the confusion became so great, that I, Krishna, have no words with which to describe it. For who was there of the servants of the Sirkar at Diksal who was not heart-broken, and filled with terror lest he should be ruined by this calamity? And many messages were sent by the wires, and request was made that Trench Sahib should come with his Police. A report also was written to the Collector Sahib to be sent by special

messenger to inform him of the occurrence. The Police sub-inspector of Diksal, a Mahometan, named Yar Mahomed, was quickly called from his house ; and he taking Ramchundra and four constables sent off as quickly as might be in two carts with fast-trotting bullocks on the road to Lukhipur to see whether they might not find the treasure and the magistrate. By this time several hours had passed ; and it may be understood that when the police started from Diksal, Kesho and his men were already riding their ponies across the valleys and the hills. Thus when Yar Mahomed came to the place where Kesho had driven the carts off the main road on to the jungle track darkness had fallen ; and there was no sign that the carts had left the road. And going on they arrived at Pimpalwada, and saw the camp of Brown Sahib—for such was the name of the Collector Sahib—pitched beneath some mango trees. Then with great fear the sub-inspector approached the camp, and sent a request that he might be admitted to the presence; and he received order to enter.

" What is it, Yar Mahomed ? " said the Sahib,

who had just partaken of his food, and was not pleased at being disturbed.

"A special report was sent to the Hoozoor," replied Yar Mahomed, "concerning the treasure. It may have been perused?"

"What treasure!" asked the Sahib, "and what report? I don't know what you mean. Has any special report been received?" he continued, turning to the chuprassy who was in attendance.

"There was a report," answered the chuprassy. "It was placed on the office table, for it did not seem good to us humble ones that the Sahib should be troubled while he sat at dinner."

"You oolloo ka butcha, son of an owl!" said the Sahib. "Never mind the report, Yar Mahomed; tell me what has happened. Is there any word of Kesho Naik?"

"There is no certainty of Kesho Naik," replied Yar Mahomed, "but who else could have carried away twelve thousand rupees and the magistrate of Diksal?"

"What!" exclaimed the Collector Sahib, "carried away treasure and the magistrate! What fool's word is this? Why, I myself when

riding this morning met Trimbuk and talked to him. He was sitting in a cart carrying treasure. We held conversation. He was to go to Lolapur because his daughter was ill. What could happen when there was a Police guard with him ? "

" This slave may be pardoned," said the Police officer, " but there is much doubt concerning these Police. There came an order from Lolapur to send treasure, and it was said that a guard would come from head quarters. And the guard came and the treasure was sent, and the Rao Sahib went with the treasure ; and afterward there was a tar from Lolapur that no order for treasure had been issued and no guard had gone to Diksal from head quarters. So what this guard was that came is not understood ; and what has become of the treasure and the Rao Sahib God knows. It is in the mind of us humble ones that this is the devilry of Kesho Naik."

" Goddam ! " said the Sahib, as is the custom of the Sahibs when they are displeased. " Goddam ! " he repeated after a pause. " Do you mean to say that these were dacoits, not Police,

whom I saw? Trimbuk seemed to have no suspicion of any villainy. This is the word of a madman. But the treasure would have passed here. There is no other road. Have you inquired in Pimpalwada?"

"I and my men have but now arrived," replied Yar Mahomed, "and there has been no time to make inquiries. It seemed right to make report to the Sahib without delay."

"Go and make full inquiries at once," said the Sahib, "and come back to me as soon as you have completed them."

Yar Mahomed salaamed and withdrew, and with his men inquired of everyone whose house was hard by the main road whether a Police guard escorting treasure had been seen passing that day. But no one had seen any guard or any treasure, or any Trimbuk. The sub-inspector and his men, hungry, thirsty, and weary as they were, were compelled to return to the Collector Sahib without in any way refreshing themselves, and to report that there were no tidings of the rupees or of the magistrate.

It was now ten o'clock; and when the sub-

inspector made his report the expression on the face of the Sahib became very grave.

" Yar Mahomed," he said, " what has happened is not understood ; but that the matter is serious, in this there is no doubt. At night no inquiries can be made. But I will order Trench Sahib to come with many Police. I know him to be at Lolapur. There is a train that leaves Lolapur at one o'clock and reaches Lukhipur at five. I will despatch a telegram requesting the Sahib to travel by that train. My tonga will await him at the station, and he will be here soon after six. Then we will all set off on the Diksal road, and look for Trimbuk and the rupees. Go, take rest and make your preparations for an early start."

Now I, Krishna, in writing these histories have had to set down many things that people have said and done, notwithstanding that I have not heard with my ears what they have said, nor seen with my eyes what they have done. And in finding out the truth and collecting the facts the burden has been a heavy one, nor was it all done in one day, but by slow degrees. But to put down that which I myself have seen and heard

is of greater advantage ; and now in what I have to write this relief has come to me, if indeed in the writing of such terrors there be relief. For on that day of confusion I was with Trench Sahib at Lolapur, and I was in attendance on the presence. Now in the afternoon when Trench Sahib was in office there came to him the officer of the great treasury, and showed him telegram papers. And I having learnt some words of English understood that the Sahib's temperament was disturbed, for I heard him say, " Well, I'm damned!"

Then the Sahib closed his office and he sent orders to his servants to make ready for the midnight train, and he ordered as many Police as could be spared from duty to accompany him. Of these there were twenty or twenty-five. And I, Krishna, was ordered to go with the presence. Then Trench Sahib having partaken of tea, as was his custom, in the office, changed his dress and went to the Gymkhana, where he played with the ball at tennis for two hours, and then he again changed his dress and went to the Club to sit at dinner with the other Sahibs.

After that he again played games, as is the

fashion of the Sahibs, placing two white balls and one red on a green table, and striking them with the end of a long spear. I, Krishna, stood in the verandah, and waited until the Sahib should come, and I was looking at this play. But why the Sahibs should always trouble themselves with striking balls is not understood. At length, it may have been between eleven and twelve o'clock, the Sahib was going to his bungalow again to change his dress. This also is not understood why many times in one day the Sahibs should make change of clothing; but this too is their custom. At that very time there came to the club a telegram for the Sahib, and he read it, and he called for me, and he said, "Krishna, this is a good word. The Collector Sahib is at Pimpalwada, and he is calling me, for this is the work of Kesho Naik."

And I said, "Sahib, this time there will be some shooting."

"That is my hope," he replied.

Thus in the night we sat in the train, the Sahib and I and other Police; and at five o'clock in the morning we came to Lukhipur. And the Sahib

ordered me to sit with him in the Collector Sahib's tonga, and in an hour we saw the tents of the Collector Sahib beneath the mango trees at Pimpalwada. Brown Sahib was ready and waiting for us at the door of the big tent. Then the Sahibs joined hands, and they sat and drank tea, smoked cigarettes, and they talked for some time about all the circumstances. And if some of their words were not clear to me yet the sense of what they were saying came to my ears.

" Are you sure it was Trimbuk ? " said Trench Sahib, after the Collector Sahib had recounted what he had himself seen.

" No doubt at all," replied Brown Sahib, " though he was very upset at his daughter's illness, and he had shaved off his moustache on account of his father's death. But not a word did he say about this so-called Police guard or anything being wrong. What the deuce has happened to him ? Has he made a bolt with the treasure ? "

" He hasn't got it in him," said Trench Sahib. " His line is bribery and corruption. I'm afraid it is my friend Kesho." Though why my Sahib

should speak of Kesho as his friend is not to be understood. "Is it possible," he continued, "that Trimbuk really knew into whose hands he had fallen, but dared not say anything?"

"The Lord only knows," said Brown Sahib, though who the Lord may have been I could not say. "The whole thing beats me. Now when you are ready, Trench, we can make a start."

And this was the manner of setting off. The two Sahibs, and this humble one, sat in the Collector Sahib's tonga; and in the tonga was a basket of food, and two saddles, and pistols for the Sahibs. Yar Mahomed with Ramchundra and four constables were in carts drawn by trotting bullocks, and for us people there were guns. The other Police who were marching on foot from the railway station were to follow as best they might. We did not travel at any speed, but rather was our pace tempered with discretion, for we halted many times to make inquiries from wayfarers, and at any dwellings that were near the road. After the first two miles there were no more houses or even huts to be seen, for the country was solitary with much jungle; and no information

was obtained from any person whom we met. When we had gone somewhat over five miles, and the jungle was very thick, we were walking and looking eagerly for some clue, when I, Krishna, observed a strange thing ; for on a forest track that was seldom used one might see that heavy carts had lately been driven. But I was silent ; for if the Sahibs perceived this circumstance first with their own eyes, would not they receive greater pleasure ? And Brown Sahib was passing on, but Trench Sahib stood still and said :

" Hullo, I say, here's some shikar ! Look at the marks of cart wheels along here ! "

" By Jove ! You are right," said the Collector Sahib. And this " By Jove " was as we should say Arhe.

Then were we all feeling great happiness, for now through the wilderness of uncertainty was disclosed the pathway of illumination. We walked along the track it may be for a mile, the tonga and the bullock-carts following with some difficulty owing to the roughness of the way, and its many twistings and turnings. And at length on coming to an open space surrounded with high trees we

beheld on a sudden so surprising a sight that our heads were turned. For here were the two carts that had been laden with the treasure ; and their drivers were lying bound and gagged beside them. And there was no treasure, and no magistrate ; but there were footprints of many ponies, and much uniform of Police which had been thrown away, and remains of fires where men had cooked food. Then Brown Sahib exclaimed, " By Jove," and Trench Sahib said " Goddam." The first thing was to unbind the two men and give them the water of refreshment. When after some time they came to themselves Trench Sahib asked them many questions. And by slow degrees, for they had been in terror of death, and their senses were confused, they related how the robbers had ridden away with the treasure, and tied the magistrate to a pony and so forced him to ride with them. And when they were asked if the leader were Kesho Naik, they denied having any knowledge, for all feared Kesho, and none would speak concerning him; not even if they had cause by which to remember him. The greater number, too, of the poor esteemed him their protector and

benefactor. In the end two of the constables were ordered to escort the two men with their carts to Pimpalwada, and to explain to the other Police where they should find the Sahibs.

Now was it to be considered what should next be done ; and concerning this the Sahibs talked for a long time. Brown Sahib was saying that the work required much bundobust (arrangement) and that nothing could be achieved in haste, for many days might be passed in following up the robbers, and tents and supplies of food should be obtained, and servants be in attendance. But to Trench Sahib this counsel was not pleasing ; and he wished to press on with so much speed as might be. He said that he had many times lived on rice and chupatties (unleavened bread) and slept on the ground, and why should he not do so again ? It was his work to follow Kesho and he would not leave it. Then the Collector Sahib said that he also would go in pursuit. So this was arranged. The ponies were taken out of the tonga, and the saddles were fastened upon them for the Sahibs to ride, and Trench Sahib said to Yar Mahomed that he and Ramchundra and

even the men might ride some of the way, taking turns with himself. And we all partook of food; and what remained from the Sahib's basket was placed in canvas bags which were slung to the ponies' saddles.

By this time it may have been ten o'clock; and the heat was great. But we Police are not to think of heat or of cold or of rain when the Sirkar's work is to be done. Hour after hour we travelled, following the footprints of the robbers' ponies, which were easily to be perceived, for they had all kept together. Although the labour was great the two Sahibs were talking and laughing all the time; and we humble ones seeing this took courage and talked and laughed also; and it might have been thought that we were travelling for pleasure rather than on a troublesome duty. So the hours passed, and the country became more hilly; and at three o'clock we came to a place where there were trees, and a tank of sweet water, and here it was seen that Kesho and his men had halted to refresh themselves. Then the Sahibs said, "We too will rest for one hour." And I, casting my eyes about, saw that on the ground lay

a paper, with a small stone upon it that it might not be blown away by the wind. And I took it to Trench Sahib, and he seeing that it was in the Mahratti language, bade me read it. And this was written on the paper :—

"To Trench Sahib Bahadur, commanding the Police of the Sirkar. From Kesho Naik, commanding the mountains and the plains.

"This slave presents greetings, and hopes that the Sahib is in enjoyment of good health. This is the request that there may soon be a meeting, and interchange of sweet words. Why should much be written? Let there be friendship.

"The signature of Kesho Naik."

Such a man was Kesho Naik. And the Sahibs laughed when I read out this letter.

After we had rested we proceeded on our way. The country had now become rough and difficult. There were precipitous and rocky hills with narrow defiles and water courses. Here and there only could the ponies be ridden, and mostly they had to be led while all walked. Few people were

to be seen in this desolate country, and they were wild Kolis or Waghris grazing a few goats that were as wild as themselves. There was no more information to be had from them than from their goats. And as each one was questioned the Collector Sahib would laugh, and say to Trench Sahib, "Make quite sure that this is not Kesho in disguise!" Thus we walked and climbed and pushed our way through briars and brushwood, and our limbs were aching; and all along we perceived that Kesho and his men had passed before us, and they too had been leading their ponies. And in one place we could see that a man had been dragged along the ground for some distance; and Trench Sahib looked and said, "This must be Trimbuk, poor devil! He must have been very sorry for himself." In fact we were all becoming sorry for ourselves as we pursued this endless journey; and as it began to grow dark Yar Mahomed was weeping and saying that he could go no further. The ponies too, who were not accustomed to such work, could hardly be urged on. But the Sahibs encouraged Yar Mahomed, and seated him on a pony, and they

said that soon we may find some place where we can halt for the night. Though how we could find anything but a ravine or a nullah could not be understood. But when we were all so exhausted that the fountains of speech were closed we saw before us all of a sudden an opening into the side of the mountain. The entrance was it may be the height of a man, and it could be seen that many people had passed in and out, and there were stones placed together outside on which food had been cooked. "Here is the robbers' cave," exlaimed Trench Sahib. "Now may we have some shikar." But if we humble ones were afraid in our hearts who shall say that this was wonderful? For the scene was of terrible aspect. The rocks were piled above us as it seemed to the sky; and the gloom and the desolation were such that I, Krishna, am not able to describe their heaviness. In truth it might be thought that this is the habitation of ghouls and evil spirits. There were a few great trees that faced the entrance of the cave; and they were so old and gnarled and knotted, and their branches so broken by the violence of the wind, that in the growing

darkness they might be taken for apparitions or spectres. What was our destiny to be in this extremity of the world?

The sun was now setting, and in a few minutes it would be quite dark. The shadow of the rock across the defile was as it were the shadow of a pestilence. The loneliness was complete. There was no sign of the presence of anything human. Then were we to enter this cave of terrors. The ponies were tethered to some bushes, though indeed there was little fear that the wearied beasts should stray away. The Sahibs loaded their revolvers and we put cartridges in our guns. Trench Sahib gave orders to collect some dry grass, and this was done. And it came into my mind, though the why and the wherefore were not certain, to sling over my shoulders the Sahibs' bags of food, together with the chagul or leather water-bottle. In this way then we, that is the Sahibs and Yar Mahomed and Ramchundra and I, with one of the constables, for one was left outside with the grooms of the ponies, entered the cavern. At first we could see nothing, but gradually our eyes became used to the darkness, and something

might be perceived. The cavern was spacious and the roof though low when we entered became higher as we slowly advanced. Soon, the night having now fallen, the darkness again became complete within this dreadful place, and Trench Sahib gave orders to kindle a little of the dry grass. By the bright flame we could see the vast size of this hiding place of robbers. We were in a great hall strewn with leaves and grass upon which men might sleep; and there were scraps of broken food and some cooking pots and clothes lying here and there. In the hall itself there was no one to be seen except ourselves; but there were passages which might lead into the bowels of the earth, and God knows who or what might not be concealed therein!

"Nothing here, I am afraid," said Trench Sahib, as the fire went out and we were again plunged in darkness. Just then a noise as of thunder resounded through this cavern of hell, and what had happened who could say?

"By Jove! what's that?" said Brown Sahib as the echoes of the crash died away; but the livers of us humble ones became water and we

were silent. "Light some more grass," said Trench Sahib; and as the flames sprang up, behold a great rock was in front of the aperture by which we had entered; and there were we, two high English officers of the Sirkar, three Hindoos, and one Mahometan, imprisoned in the depths of the mountain. Then it was understood that our destiny was fixed; for how should we avoid our death in this dungeon of despair?

Then while the fire of grass was still giving light I saw that Brown Sahib and Trench Sahib looked at each other, and they were both laughing with great laughter.

"Quite theatrical, isn't it, sir?" said Trench Sahib.

"By Jove! you're right," said Brown Sahib. And they laughed yet more.

CHAPTER VIII

THE ADVENTURES IN THE CAVERN OF ADVERSITY

Then this slave understood that in truth the Sahibs are mad; for what sane man will jest in the presence of death? But there is no comprehension of the Sahibs. And we humble ones were weeping and reciting prayers, while the Sahibs were smoking cigarettes. Then Trench Sahib called to me, Krishna, and asked if there was food. And I replied that by the favour of the Sahib there was food for all, and also water. And again grass was kindled, little by little, while we refreshed ourselves; and at the conclusion no grass remained, for all was consumed. And with the food some courage returned to us. Meanwhile the Sahibs had been conversing, and Trench Sahib gave this order:

"Listen, you people. Now is it our business to sleep and rest. And in the morning when we

have thrown off fatigue it shall be seen what there is to do. But a watch must be kept. First I will watch for one hour, and then the Collector Sahib, and each of the others in turn. Here are matches, and the time can be seen by my watch. It is now eight o'clock."

So the order was obeyed; and sleep was heavy after so much weariness. And as it seemed in the space of a few minutes the Collector Sahib awoke me, and bade me go on phara, as two hours had passed. Thus I took the watch, and the Sahib slept. And that the time might pass I recounted to myself all the things that Kesho had done, until it seemed that an hour must have gone by. Then I struck a match and looked at the watch; but only fifteen minutes had passed. So again I reflected on all the evil deeds of Kesho. While I was still engaged in these thoughts there came to my mind a consciousness of something less or more in the heavy darkness; but what it might be I could not hear or perceive. And fear came to me of gins and ghouls. Then of a sudden, though whence it came I knew not, there was a voice saying:

"Salaam, Trench Sahib!" and the voice was the voice of Kesho.

"Sahib! Sahib!" I shouted, and I placed my hands on the Sahib, who was lying close to where I stood; "Sahib, awake. Kesho is here!"

In a moment the Sahib awoke, and I said again, "Sahib, Kesho is here; shall there now be shooting?"

"Chupraho, be silent, foolish one," he replied. "Who shall shoot in this darkness? Where art thou, Kesho, if indeed thou art present?"

"Salaam, Sahib," came the voice of Kesho, though whence it came who should say? "Has the Sahib comfort? How can this slave offer suitable hospitality to the presence?"

"There is no word of discomfort," said the Sahib, "but was there need to disturb the sleep of a guest? Come in the morning and there shall be a time for sweet words. Now let me sleep. Rooksat. Thou hast permission to go." Such an one was Trench Sahib.

"The word is good," said Kesho; "I take my leave." And it was understood that he had departed, for no more was his voice heard. And

Trench Sahib, after some time, held my hand, and drawing my face to his whispered :

" Listen, Krishna. In this there is good. If a man can come in a man can go out. In the morning it shall be seen."

At length this night, which might have been a night of years, not of hours, passed by. When all had kept watch for one hour it was two o'clock, and the turn began a second time ; and when Ramchundra had kept his second watch it was six o'clock. A little daylight then began to penetrate the cave, for the rock that had fallen over the entrance did not fit so closely but that the darkness was in some degree dispelled. Thus were we as blind men who were recovering their sight. The first thing that we then did was to examine the rock which blocked the entrance. It was not difficult to perceive that it had been designed to set purpose for the closing of the aperture, being suspended in readiness on a ledge in the mountain side until it was needed either to keep out an enemy or to shut in any intruders as rats in a trap. Seven elephants pulling at ropes and chains might have moved it away ;

but for what strength we possessed it was as firm as the mountain itself. Of escape by this entrance there was no hope. But Trench Sahib had said that if a man could come in a man could go out; and in this thought there was consolation to us despairing ones. This then was our quest, to find the way of deliverance. And in truth the need was urgent, for we were in evil plight. Food there was none, and of water but a scanty supply. Matches we had, but what was there to kindle with them? Once also we shouted through the crevices to the men who had been left outside; but no reply came from them.

"Listen, you people," said Trench Sahib, after he and Brown Sahib had conversed; "this is what we have to do. It is known to you that Kesho Naik was within this place last night; and if he had a way of departure it is for us to find it. Now we have to explore the passages which we saw in the evening by the light of the fire. But there must be no risk of losing each other in the darkness. Each must take hold of the other by the hand so that we form one line. The Collector Sahib and I go in front, and you follow in order."

This then was arranged; and Trench Sahib led the way, holding in his hand one of the guns with which to feel each step before he placed one foot in front of the other. As I have written, in the great hall we could see something, though not much; and it was a strange appearance that was presented by this line of six men moving at the pace of a tortoise through the gloomy subterranean abyss, as it might be so many shades creeping sadly in the kingdom of Yum (the god of death). Trench Sahib, holding the gun in his right hand, was feeling the side of the vault with his left, as he cautiously went along, so that the way might not be mistaken, and in due course we might find ourselves once more at the place where we had started, if meanwhile no means of escape were to be met with. Soon on our left there was a turning, and into this we took our way; and the darkness was as though it could be felt. We stumbled along as best we could, for the floor was rough and uneven. Once we were startled by a great whirr, and upon my face there came a heavy blow. What evil spirit is this? I thought, as I called "Rama! Rama!" and

my knees sank beneath me; but Trench Sahib laughed and said, "Arhe, art scared by a bat?" Gradually the passage became narrower, and the roof was low, so that we could not walk upright; and Trench Sahib said, "Ahiste! Ahiste! Slowly, slowly." Then was our pace slower than that of an ant, and as the Sahib was feeling his way on a sudden there was nothing to be felt beneath the gun, and he cried "Halt." Then he struck a match, and before him was a deep chasm like a well, as it might be three cubits across. And he struck another match and when it was in full flame and the wood was well kindled, he let it fall, and to a great depth the red spark of the match was seen descending until it ceased to burn.

"What do you make of this?" asked the Collector Sahib.

"Can't say," replied Trench Sahib. "I think we will try some other way out of this maze."

Then he gave the order for all to stand still while he, followed by Brown Sahib, and each in order, turned round, and passing with difficulty through the narrow space he was again in front

of the line. And so we came again into the main hall; and the dim light was refreshment to our eyes. Here we stood for a few minutes, and then the march was resumed in the same way. Two more passages we explored. They both ended in the bare rock, and no way of deliverance was found, though neither was there any chasm. And on regaining the hall it was seen that there was one more passage. By this time the agony of despair had closed upon us; and the perspiration of terror was upon our foreheads. Still Trench Sahib and Brown Sahib were laughing, and each time were saying, "Better luck next time?" And by this our spirits remained alive.

The fourth passage was broader than the others; but it had many turnings, and God knows where we wandered in the bowels of the hill. And at last a wonderful thing happened; for first it seemed less dark as we slowly proceeded, and by degrees the sides of the passage became visible. Then was the nadir of despair turned into the zenith of expectancy; and we gave a shout of joy, but the echo of our voices in this burrow was like the hoarse cry of vultures that come to

pick the carcases. Then in a moment, on turning another corner there came to our eyes the full light of the blessed sun; and our hope attained certainty. From this may be learnt the hollowness of deceit. For an aperture there was, but a mere loophole, and so narrow that not a child, much less a grown man, might pass through it.

"Now we will have some shooting," said Trench Sahib. And he opened the breech of the gun, took out the cartridge and removed the shot, leaving only powder. This then was to be the shooting? But I came to understand that he meant to attract attention. So he fired the gun through the opening, and the echo reverberated through the tortuous windings of the passage, dying away and reviving again with terrifying sound. When the reverberation had ceased we waited in expectancy of what might happen.

"Is the temperament of the Sahibs equal?" asked someone from without; and we recognised the accursed voice of Kesho Naik. "Can this humble one do aught for the Sahib's convenience?"

"The temperament of the Sahibs is quite equal," said Trench Sahib; "and the experience

of new sensations is agreeable. But sweet words can better be exchanged when faces are seen."

"There will be no shooting?" asked Kesho.

"There will be no shooting," replied Trench Sahib, "without fullness of warning. This is my word." And I thought, word or no word, surely the Sahib will shoot now after this villainy. For why should such a Shaitan live?

"Salaam, Sahib!" said Kesho, as his head appeared in the full light. "This is a good meeting. Can this humble one do aught for the Sahib's convenience?"

"Be-shuk, certainly, it is a good meeting," answered Trench Sahib. "And for our convenience this may be done. The breakfast provided by our servants to-day was not suitable; and chupatties and ghee and fruit together with milk and water may be supplied. For this kindness we shall be grateful. A message may also be sent to Lolapur for change of clothing."

"The refreshment is present," said Kesho; "and for the clothing shall word be sent."

It may here be said that Kesho caused a letter to be written to the officer at Lolapur, and it

was posted at Pimpalwada. And the message that it contained was that Brown Sahib and Trench Sahib had accepted his hospitality, and that they required clothing which might be sent to the cavern of obscurity in the mountain of safety.

In a few minutes there was handed in through the aperture a supply of bread and mangoes and a pot of ghee with several lotas of milk and a jar of water ; and we all ate and drank in the sunlight that streamed into our prison. But Trench Sahib kept the pot of ghee himself.

" This is a great tamasha ! " said Kesho, as we had finished, and he laughed. Now the laugh of Kesho was as the laugh of the father of devils.

" Yes, this is a great tamasha ! " said Trench Sahib, and he also laughed, " but some day there may be a greater."

" The word is true," answered Kesho. " Some day the Burra Sahib of Bombay and the War Lord-Sahib may come to my durbar. But this slave has business and cannot remain to enjoy the sweet words of the presence. Refreshment will be provided morning and evening for the Sahibs and their men at this place."

"We shall not require the favour for long," said Trench Sahib. "When a man can come in a man can go out."

"It is easy to open the lock when the key has been found," answered Kesho; and he made salaam and departed.

"Quite an amusing scoundrel," said Trench Sahib.

"He would make his fortune as a stage manager," rejoined the Collector Sahib; and they laughed again. "What are you going to do with that ghee?" he continued.

Then they conversed in whispers, and at last Trench Sahib gave order to return to the entrance of the cavern. Slowly and very cautiously we made our way through the twistings and turnings of the dark tunnels; and in the end we stood where the great stone blocked the way into this dungeon. Then Trench Sahib gave order to collect some of the clothing that was lying on the floor. And feeling it with his hands he selected two pieces. These he smeared thickly with the ghee which he had kept, and he wound them up into rolls, each it may be a cubit in length, and he smeared more ghee outside. Then he struck a

match and set a light to one of the rolls; and behold, here was a torch burning. That the flame was bright may not be affirmed; but it was something, and we could dimly see what we were doing. Then he took the remainder of the clothing; and he divided it into long strips, and each he twisted into a strong roll. And he pulled each to test its strength. With the eyes of curiosity we were watching what was being done; for who could say what was intended? Then the Sahib tied all these rolls together until there was a stout rope fifteen cubits in length; and he appeared satisfied with his work.

"Now," he said, when he had completed this task, "we must not lose our health by want of exercise. We will have a tug-of-war." So we, whose heads were turned by this madness, pulled at the tug-of-war; and Trench Sahib and this humble one and Ramchundra pulled over the Collector Sahib and Yar Mahomed and the constable, whose name was Govind. Then Trench Sahib gave shahbash; and he said, "Now I know this rope of deliverance is strong enough. This is the time of departure. Where a man can

come in six men can go out." But to us humble ones it seemed only that the Sahib's brain was becoming as that of a child.

"Listen," said the Sahib. "In the morning when the kindled match was thrown down the well something was seen. But I left it then, for without a torch what could be done? Some easier way, too, might have been found. But now in my mind is there certainty. With this torch and this rope the end will be attained. In this business silence is required."

Then we followed the narrow passage, with less difficulty by reason of the torch; and our minds were in amazement, and we were saying to ourselves, "What will the Sahib do?" Trench Sahib was in front, carrying the torch; and we were all holding on to the long rope. When we came to the chasm the Sahib gave the order to halt; and then he carefully examined the rocky floor with his torch. After that he took the rope from us, and tied the torch to it, and he lowered it into the well, and waved it about slowly. "Hoorah!" he exclaimed at last, though not loudly, but so to speak in a whisper, "the length

is sufficient." Then he pulled up the rope and gave the torch to Brown Sahib to hold; and I, Krishna, saw that by the edge of the abyss there was an iron staple fixed in the rock. And he felt this to see that it was firm. But my liver became water, for was a man to be lowered into this pit of hell? Whose life was to be first thrown away? How can I set down the terror and consternation of that moment? But to avoid one's fate is not permitted. Very slowly and carefully the Sahib attached the rope to the staple with many knots, and then, while each was wondering who should first be plunged into this abyss of death, the Sahib tied the other end of the ripe round his own waist. Round his neck he fastened the torch which had not yet been lit. Then grasping with his hands the upper extremity of the rope he lowered himself into the chasm while Brown Sahib held the torch over him. But the light did not penetrate to any depth; and into this inky well of terror the Sahib disappeared from our sight. How should it be known what was to be his destiny? Then it was perceived that the rope was swinging from side to side, and of a

sudden the strain became less, and then it hung quite loose. What terrible thing had befallen my Sahib? We dreaded to hear the sound of a fall, whether into water or on to rock, but none came. At length, it may have been minutes, or hours, or years, deep down on one side of the well there was struck a match; and we breathed again, for the Sahib must be safe. While we waited in silence for what next might be seen the glow of the second torch was observed, and we could dimly discern the Sahib standing on a platform in the gloomy depth. What he was doing could not be known; but in a few moments there was a shaking of the rope, and this was a signal for drawing it up. When we had done this, behold to the rope was pinned a small piece of paper, and Brown Sahib slowly read it.

"All well," it ran. "There is a passage. I will explore it and let you know where it leads to. Wait where you are."

This was explained to us in a whisper; and then we waited and waited and waited in pitchy darkness. Trench Sahib had extinguished his torch before he went into the passage; and our

torch being nearly consumed, was also put out, so that we might kindle the remaining portion when there should be need. The rope, it should be said, had again been lowered. At last, at last, a match was struck below, and the torch was again lit, and the rope pulled. What news was to come to us now? With the haste of expectancy we snatched at the paper which might be a warrant of death or a renewal of life.

"All well," it said. "Where one man can come in six men can go out. I want help. Send down Krishna. When I give the signal pull up the rope and arrange what is attached to it."

"Why the deuce can't he say what he means?" muttered Brown Sahib beneath his breath. "Down you go, Krishna," he continued in a whisper.

I could say no word; but trembling with fear I tied the rope round my waist. Brown Sahib tested the knot, and said "All right"; and I went down into the abyss, gripping the rope between my legs, and clinging with each hand in turn to the portion above me. At length I heard Trench Sahib's voice saying, "Shahbash,

Krishna," and I felt his hand on my shoulder, and in a moment I was standing beside him in the opening of a passage. So was death escaped.

" Now," said the Sahib, " himmut bhurro, take courage. Here is a bamboo ladder. We must tie it to the rope for them to haul it up, and so descend with ease."

In the end this was done. The task, however, was a heavy one to us who had no knowledge of the matter, though to Kesho's men it may through much use have been easy. But at last after the ladder was jammed many times against the sides, and had stuck once, twice, and again against this obstacle and that, it reached the top, and was bound securely to the staple. Then first descended Yar Mahomed, and next Ramchundra, then Govind, and last of all Brown Sahib. And the Sahibs joined hands, and Brown Sahib exclaimed, " By Jove ! " Then Trench Sahib said, " I have seen the end of the passage. No torch may be used, and no word is to be spoken. There may be shooting. But the rope we must have."

And he climbed up the ladder and untied the

rope and brought it down. He passed the rope between us, and we all held it with our hands as before. Then the order was given to proceed on our knees and elbows, for the passage was low. The floor moreover was rough, and the sharp stones drew blood, but we remembered that life was before us, and death behind. So, slowly, like a snake winding its tortuous way through its hole in the ground, we crept along in the black darkness, until at last the blackness became less, and we could dimly see the sides of the tunnel. And then on turning a corner we were once more in God's sunshine, and the opening was sufficient for our passing through, though what was beyond was not known. Thus was it understood how Kesho had entered the cavern at night; and if Trench Sahib has at times had no understanding, and refrained from shooting this miscreant when he might have been shot, and our troubles avoided, yet who can say that in these circumstances he did not display the wisdom of the Rishis and the courage of the God Krishna whose name was given to this humble one?

But even now when the way of safety seemed

assured, what adverse fate might be ours? For though bushes lined this entrance and we could see nothing, yet we could hear much talking, and this was our fear that we were in an ambush of Kesho and his men, who might now take our lives, or again imprison us in the mountain of adversity. But Trench Sahib creeping softly through the bushes saw that the men were our own Police; and laughing aloud he leapt into the open ground, and gave the command, "Fall in; right dress." And they in astonishment obeyed and gave "present arms," while we too clambered out of the bushes, and behold we had emerged close to the great entrance, now closed by the rock, through which we had yesterday gone into the dungeon. And again the Sahibs laughed; and we humble ones, who had died many times and lived again, what could we do but sit down and laugh also?

What may be written concerning the end of this confusion? Rather might it be asked whether there would ever be any ending. There might as well have been a pursuit of the dust-devil that is driven along by the wind. Many things indeed

were done, but the fortune of Kesho was in the ascendant. With great difficulty was gunpowder obtained in large quantities from Lolapur; and the rock that blocked the entrance to the cave was blown away with a great explosion, and a guard of Police was placed in this hiding-place. The Sirkar at Bombay was consumed with anger when it was learnt how Kesho had looted the treasury and stolen away the magistrate; and many Police were deputed from other districts, and a native pultan (regiment) was sent out, and parties of sepoys and officers were posted here and there on the hills and in the valleys. This was to as much purpose as though elephants were employed to catch a gnat in the forest. The Sirkar too offered to send white soldiers, but Trench Sahib said, "When it is known where this upstart is to be found, then guns and white soldiers will be useful." Kesho for his part vanished from those regions as the mist disappears before the brightness of the sun. From some unknown distant place he published his gazette and recounted therein how Brown Sahib and Trench Sahib had favoured him by accepting his

hospitality ; and copies were posted to the Sirkar and the great officers at places fifty and a hundred miles apart, so that these might furnish no clue to Kesho's whereabouts.

For a whole month Trench Sahib scoured that country by day and by night, taking no rest, until it was known that this rebel was certainly gone from hence. And we of the Police were wearied with this constant marching. Our feet were sore, and our clothing was in rags, and our bones showed through our skins for want of proper food. Nor could even Trench Sahib find occasion for laughing. Of Trimbuk nothing was heard ; and the people were saying, " This is the end of an eater of bribes, and a corrupter of justice." And this slave was heavy at heart for all these troubles, and more especially at the foolishness of Trench Sahib who would not shoot when the miscreant was in his power. For there was this thought also, that had the bullet long ago put an end to Kesho, the burden of this writing would have been spared me.

CHAPTER IX

KESHO NAIK'S DARING ENTERPRISE IN THE HARBOUR OF BOMBAY

While Trench Sahib and we of the Police were scouring the mountains and the valleys in search of this prince of thieves and wearing out our breath and our strength on a fruitless task, Kesho turned his mind to another affair. And whether this exploit were less or more audacious than what had gone before who should say? For amongst things that are equal which can be considered the greater? And the villainies of this rogue were of such a nature that none could compare with them for daring. But what I have now to write is unexampled in cleverness. Though what he did in the end is not that which he planned in the beginning; but rather what his destiny placed in his hands.

One day Kesho was holding council with the

greater ones among his followers, of whom the chief men were now Jiwan the railway man, Balaji the Brahmin, and Rambhao the deceiver of treasury officers. This was shortly after the imprisonment of the servants of the Sirkar in the cavern of bitterness; and the council was in a distant hiding-place in the fastnesses of the Ghauts. Of such places, old forts, or secret recesses in the hills, countless ones were known to Kesho. And if peaceable travellers were seen walking, or even riding, on the roads or tracks between such refuges, who should say that these are lawless rebels?

"That was a good tamasha!" said Kesho, who was reclining on a charpoy (light bedstead) that was covered with cushions and rich coverlets, while the councillors stood before him, for they revered him as an incarnation and feared him as men fear death.

"Wah, wah! be-shuk, certainly; who but Kesho Maharaj should conceive such a tamasha!" said the councillors, who vied with one another in flattery of their chief. And Kesho's heart became full with the incense of their sweet words.

"Shahbash," said he. "Good work has been accomplished. But in idleness there is no satisfaction. Something more must be done for the gazette. Let it be said what should be taken in hand."

Then one said this and the other said that; but nothing to Kesho appeared acceptable.

"Good followers are ye, but useless leaders," said he. "Now in my mind there is this. We have taken back from these English Sahibs the command of the land. What are their courts and their cutcherries? Is not Kesho the dispenser of justice, and the protector of the poor? Is it not said that God gives nothing immediately from Himself, but takes from one and gives to another? Have not I obeyed this saying?"

"Wah, wah!" said the councillors. "Who can speak with the wisdom of Kesho? Who but the Maharaj can dispense justice?"

"Well, well, so be it," continued Kesho. "Now will I disclose my intention. It is known that the English Sahibs have conquered the world by their ships. But did not the great Shivaji also have a fleet? Did not his admiral Kanhoji

Angria dispute the rule of the sea with the English? Did not his son Tulaji seize their ships and capture their cargoes? I too will make a fleet and take their vessels. Something of the sea and the shipping was seen at the time of the Durbar, but now shall acquaintance ripen. This is good that on the water also Kesho's name shall be great."

Then the councillors uttered many flatteries and praises; but in their hearts they were trembling with fear concerning this enterprise, though none dared breathe a word against aught that Kesho said. With Kesho between the thought and the deed there was no separation; and that very day, having made choice of twelve men who were renowned for courage, he set off for Bombay to carry out his plan.

When much has to be written let there not be many words on small matters. It is enough to say that Kesho and his twelve dare-devils engaged rooms in the heart of the city, where among so many lakhs and crores of people they would not attract attention or incur suspicion. And then by twos and threes they set themselves to observe the customs of shipping, first by hanging about the

docks and the quays, and watching the fire-boats and the sailing craft and the rowing boats come and go ; both the vessels of our people and those of the Sahibs. And when they learnt that steamers went across the harbour carrying passengers for a few annas they too made frequent journeys in them, and they came to understand many things, and how orders were given for the starting and the stopping of the vessels. At other times they engaged sailing-boats and were taken in and out of the ships in the harbour as it pleased them ; and they looked at the great warships and the guns that pointed from their sides. It chanced that one night there was exercise of these ships, with the firing of guns by sea and also from the forts by land ; and Kesho was pleased, and he said : "By this means have the English conquered the world ; but it shall be seen what Kesho can do." And finding that steamers with passengers went daily up and down the coast between Bombay and Goa, the city of the Portuguese, calling at many ports between, he and his men travelled several times on this voyage, and they learnt many things. And going ashore at

Goa and seeing the management and the officers he laughed and said : " Why does not the English Sirkar take this place ? Is it that they have left it for me ? " This too he did. Having observed the smaller fire-boats which were called launches, flying in and out of the shipping, like bees around a hive, and understanding that these could be hired, he engaged one that was very swift ; and he used to take food and enjoy himself in this conveyance, and on one excuse and another, being accompanied by Jiwan and Mahdu, who knew English, he visited many of the great merchant ships of all nations. And seeing the ships and the men and the arrangements of the ships, both English and others, he said : " It is not wonderful that these English have conquered the world."

Among the ships in the harbour which he visited several times was one named the *Bella Flora*. It was of lesser size than other steamers, yet not so small but that it might cross the black water. It was not English, but of some other nation, though the captain could speak in English. To this captain as to others Kesho would take

baskets of fresh fruit as a present ; and he used to talk agreeably, through one of his interpreters, praising each ship in turn. Now this captain of the *Bella Flora*, though he made Kesho welcome, was harsh and brutal to his men ; and one day Kesho saw him give many blows to one of the lascars, or sailors of our country folk. "I will see this man later," said Kesho in our language to Jiwan ; but openly he made no comment, though he remembered this in his mind. He even feigned such friendship that twice he invited the captain to his rooms and gave him refreshment.

Now while Kesho was engaged in making his plans there happened that which caused him to some extent to alter his design, and also to hasten his action. South of Bombay, at the distance of twenty miles, there is situated the town and port of Hirakot ; and this place was the head quarters of a district, offices and cutcherries and courts being established there. It is to be understood that when Kesho was himself engaged in some great operation the men of his band were not idle ; but travelling long distances they were

committing many dacoities and robberies and other wickednesses. One evening there came word to Kesho in Bombay that five of his men had been arrested in the Hirakot district, and the case had been heard by the magistrate and the men were already committed for trial to the Sessions Court which was beyond Bombay, and on the second day they were to leave for Bombay by the steamer from Goa that called at Hirakot in the early morning. And hearing this Kesho was filled with anger.

"Arhe!" he exclaimed, "what word is this? What insolent ones have presumed to interfere with my officers of justice? This is to be seen to. Without doubt these men must be released. There shall also be a retribution."

Then for some hours he was thinking, and giving orders; and he directed that six of his men should travel by the Goa steamer as far as Rewa, which was beyond Hirakot, and there await the returning steamer and take places therein for Bombay. The use of this artifice is to be seen.

"At this time also," he said, "I will see that man on the *Bella Flora* ag-boat." And having

arrived at this thought his mind became more easy; and all partook of food, and rested until the morning. It is to be said that previous to this Kesho and his twelve men had gradually provided themselves with pistols each holding six cartridges; and these weapons were small, and could easily be concealed in a man's clothing.

The next morning, after the six men had departed, this prince of villains ordered his steam launch to be prepared, and he sent Jiwan and Balaji with presents of fruit and fresh milk and sweet cakes to the *Bella Flora*. And they bore this message, that as the captain had already honoured him by accepting his hospitality he hoped that the other European officers of the ship would come to his poor house that evening; and he promised to send a launch for them at six o'clock, when their work would be finished. This invitation was readily accepted. At the time arranged a launch was sent; but this was not Kesho's own but one that he had engaged for the purpose. A few minutes later Kesho and his six men seated themselves in Kesho's own launch, and taking a circuitous course, but keeping the

other in sight, they watched till they saw the ship's officers arrive at the Bombay side of the harbour. Then they steered for the *Bella Flora*. At this time the tide was running out, and the *Bella Flora* swung to her anchor with her stern towards the mouth of the harbour. She was the most distant of all the ships from the dockyard, and thus the side on which was the ladder for ascending the deck was invisible both to Bombay and to any of the other ships in the harbour. This too has remained to be said ; and if other things have been omitted in writing, this slave may be pardoned in consideration of the heaviness of the burden. The youth who managed the engine of the launch was a Mahometan named Ismail. He was of an open disposition, and he had become on very friendly terms with Kesho, and was prepared to obey any order that he might give. To him, on their way to the ship, Kesho unfolded something, and promised him good employment if he was faithful, adding threats of death if he should in any way be guilty of deception. Ismail thereupon promised complete obedience ; and he became a member of Kesho's band.

The crew of the *Bella Flora*, who were all lascars, paid no attention to the arrival of the launch, which they had seen many times before. She was tied to the ship's side, and then in a moment Kesho and his men were on the deck ; yet their movements were quiet, and there was no appearance of any violent intention. Nor indeed in a peaceful place like Bombay who should expect that there would be armed pirates ? One of Kesho's men went to converse with the sailors at their quarters which they called the " fore-castle," and another to some more of their number who were at the stern of the vessel.

Meanwhile in a moment of time Kesho and the remaining four made their way to the captain's cabin, opened the door and rushed in. The captain, who was sitting in an easy chair, was amazed at this intrusion, but yet could not understand what was intended. Then Kesho, holding a pistol to his head, said, " Sit still and move not, or I fire." But the captain was no coward ; and instantly springing up he struck at the pistol to knock it from Kesho's hand. In the confusion the pistol went off, but where the

bullet went to God knows. The captain, furious with rage, seized Kesho and endeavoured with all his might to throw him down; and they rocked this way and that in each other's grip, for both were strong men, and the struggle was terrific. The captain was fighting, as he certainly thought, for his life, and was shouting fiercely in his own language, and striking violent blows on Kesho's head and chest. Kesho on his part uttered no sound except the panting of his breath, and was rather engaged in warding off than delivering blows. What he sought was a favourable opportunity. This contest of two tigers was between themselves alone; for while they surged to one side and the other, like waves of an angry sea, it was impossible for Kesho's men to assist their chief. At length Kesho, having skill in wrestling, while in this his adversary was deficient, managed by a clever trick to hurl the captain on the floor; and they both fell together with a crash as of thunder, Kesho being on the top of the other. "Now," he said to his men, "seize him and bind him." Then two of them with Kesho secured the captain, who though foaming

at the mouth in his fury, was helpless against such odds ; and they tied him up with rope which they had brought for the purpose. Then were Kesho's injuries attended to, for he had received heavy blows ; and on his face was much blood.

The account of this battle of giants has taken long to describe ; but in its happening the time was not so great. And it may be understood that when the pistol shot was heard the sailors ran to see what had taken place ; but two of Kesho's men stood outside the captain's door with pistols to shoot any who might try to interfere. But in truth the men being unarmed were not anxious to lose their lives for the sake of a master whose treatment of them was harsh. And Kesho, when he had recovered his breath, sent for the lascar whom he had seen beaten and ordered him to thrash the captain with a rope. At first the man was not willing, for he feared that the captain would afterwards take revenge, but Kesho laughed and said that he would take him into his service and give him better pay. So the lascar gave lashes to the captain, and there and then joined Kesho's band.

This was not the end of Kesho's chastisement. Again he held his pistol to the captain's head and bade him give up the keys of his safe. Being helpless he was forced to say where the keys were. The safe was then opened; and there were one hundred and twenty sovereigns in English money, and two hundred rupees. The gold was kept by Kesho; but he distributed the rupees to the lascars of the ship. And to the captain he gave this threat, that if he beat his sailors again he, Kesho, would certainly return and administer punishment.

"Now," said Kesho to his men, "it is time to go, for there is much work before us; and some fool may be coming here to give us trouble."

He then gave orders to the sailors that after half an hour they might release their captain, who could then do what he pleased. And laughing and smiling, as though instead of having taken part in a desperate fight he had done nothing more than watch the movements of nautch girls, he took his place in the launch and his men unloosed the rope and set the steam. But meanwhile something had been arranged by one

of the lascars which was not perceived by Kesho or his men; for certain flags had been hoisted on the mast which to those who had knowledge of such things signified that the ship was in distress. And there was a steam launch of the harbour Police that used to keep watch among the shipping; and the Police, observing the flags, made for the *Bella Flora* to learn what had happened. Hardly had Kesho's launch darted past the stern of the ship than the Police boat came round the bow from the other side. And having some suspicion they shouted to Kesho to stop, but he only gave orders to put on more steam. The Police were in doubt as to whether they should pursue him at once, or first ascertain what had happened; and through Kesho's good fortune they backed their launch alongside the steamer, and a few minutes were passed in making inquiries.

No sooner had they understood what terrrible crime had been committed than they put on full steam, and dashed in pursuit. And now there was the fiercest race of these two, one for escape and the other for capture, as the dove flies when the hawk follows. Kesho was at the beginning

it may be a third of a mile ahead. His launch was swift, but so was that of the Police; and which was to enjoy good fortune was not yet determined. In each boat furious exertion was made, and the fires were filled up with coal; and Kesho and his men were looking back, while the Police directed their eyes to the front. Nor was this chase unobserved. It was the custom of the Sahibs in the cool of the evening to move about the harbour in yachts, which it may be said were pleasure boats that carried sail upon sail; and the yachts could fly through the water when the wind was favourable, as the eagle spreads its wings and darts through the air. And it chanced that when this chase began, a yacht was not far away; and the Sahibs on board, observing the pursuit, wished to see what was to happen. So the yacht too was following, but not in a direct course, for the wind was against her; and it was necessary to tack this way or that.

By this time the sun was setting, and darkness was soon to come on. And Kesho said, "This is a great tamasha," but Jiwan and the

others noted that the distance between the boats was less, and they greatly feared. And they feared still more when a bullet came whizzing past them, and another struck the side of the launch, for the Police had a musket or more, and were firing at Kesho's boat. And Kesho laughed, and he fired a pistol in the direction of the Police to show that he too possessed arms. Thus each boat dashed through the waves; for the tide, as I have said, was running out, and with sunset there sprang up a fresh breeze from the west, and this meeting the tide caused exceeding roughness of the water and raised great billows which flowed over into the boats. So some were bailing out the water while others were heaping on coal in the furnaces. As it grew dark both boats had passed all the shipping, and they were drawing nearer to the open sea. Kesho's boat was ahead, but not by so great a distance; and he and his men could hear the Police shouting to them to stop. And Kesho sent back abuse of their fathers and their mothers.

So heated were the furnaces that the flames were bursting forth through the funnels, and there

was the roaring of the fires and the hissing of the steam, and with this and the noise of the waves and the shouting of the men on each of the boats it was as though all the devils of hell were let loose on the face of the waters.

Nearer and nearer came the Police, and again there was the crack of muskets, and Kesho and his men fired their pistols, and bullets hissed through the air. One of Kesho's men was struck, though the wound was slight; and from the Police boat there was a scream which showed that at last one of Kesho's bullets had taken effect. Kesho had thrown off his puggri and was standing bareheaded in the stern of his boat; and he shouted defiance at the Police while he waved his arms in the air to encourage his men to put on greater speed. But in this it seemed that there was no advantage; for the pursuing boat was close upon them now, and a man held out a grappling iron wherewith to seize hold of Kesho's boat. Then, while it seemed that Kesho's fortune had turned, and the doors of hope were drawn to, in the Police launch there was in a moment the crash as of the end of the world, and

as though the stars in this firmament were shaken, and their launch stopped. Then was it understood that by the pressure of steam the boiler had exploded.

Then Kesho gave the word also to stop, and he said, "These fools who eat the Sirkar's salt do but earn their pay, and they are not so much to blame. Let it be seen if we can give assistance." So he turned his launch and was going to the Police boat which had fallen some distance behind, but meanwhile shouts were heard from the Police, and it was seen that the yacht bearing the Sahibs was approaching, for her lights were visible. Then Kesho said, "The Sahibs can look to their own servants; we will now leave them."

The boats were by this time near the mouth of the harbour; and it was not Kesho's intention to proceed to the open sea. So he gave orders to steam back for some distance up the harbour until they came to the entrance of the river which flows into the harbour from the south. And up this river he took his course, steaming at a moderate pace only, lest in the darkness some obstacle should be met with. About ten miles

up this stream there was a place called Dhurumter, and thence there was a road to Hirakot, to which place the distance was thirteen miles. At this Dhurumter there was a ferry; and a few houses, and a landing-place. A steamer used to come so far every day from Bombay with passengers; but beyond the water was less, and steamers could not go further. Then Kesho, who had learnt all these places, said that they must not go within two miles of Dhurumter lest the sound of the launch should be heard, and suspicion arise. So at two miles before Dhurumter the speed was reduced; and looking for a suitable place as well as they could in the dark they perceived a small creek. Up this opening they took the launch, and after a little distance they ran her ashore, and got out, though not without difficulty, for the tide was low and the banks were muddy. There were Kesho and his six men, with Ismail the engineer, and the lascar from the *Bella Flora*. By reason of the mud they took off their shoes and carried them in their hands, holding up their dhoters above their knees. At last they were on firm ground; and

they found a small tank where they washed the mud from their feet. Then Kesho ordered that they should not travel in one party, but two and two, reaching the Hirakot road at different times and different places, care being taken that there were no passers-by where they stepped from the jungle or the fields on to the road. And they were to purchase tickets for Bombay in the early morning at the Hirakot steamer office, and to have no converse with each other; but upon the steamer they should sit together on the deck near where the Police should be guarding the prisoners. Beyond that Kesho did not disclose his plan.

One thing more is to be written at this place. The Sahibs in the yacht went on to the Police launch and found that two of the men were injured by the steam, though not so seriously; and these they took to the hospital in Bombay, after themselves affording what relief they could. And for the launch, the anchor was lowered, and there she was to wait with the remainder of the Police until another launch could come and tow her away. And the Sahibs were in amazement about

the piracy, and information was given to the Police that the pirate launch had, as it seemed, gone up the Dhurumter river. Then in the Police office there was great confusion; for how such a crime could be committed in the harbour of Bombay was not understood. And as soon as might be a small launch was sent to rescue the Police, and a larger one with ten armed men was despatched across the harbour with orders to proceed up the river to Dhurumter in search of the pirates. This launch steamed slowly up the river, the men looking hither and thither for the author of all the trouble; but the night being dark they did not see where Kesho had gone up the creek.

When the day was beginning to break they reached Dhurumter and made inquiries for the pirate launch, but nothing was known of her; so they became angry and gave abuses to the people. A telegram also was sent from Bombay to Hirakot bidding the officers to send Police to Dhurumter, and watch the paths that led to the mountains. This was done, but not until daybreak; and the Police going along the

road to Dhurumter passed Kesho and his men at different places. But there was no suspicion in their minds, for it was customary that there should be many strangers on the road; and that the robbers should make their way to Hirakot, where there were many Police, was the last thing that might be looked for. Kesho himself, when he saw the Police coming along the road, said to Jiwan, who was beside him, "Now we will have a tamasha," and he stood in front of the havildar of Police and made salaam.

"Salaam, havildar-ji," he said, "we have come from Dhurumter; and the people there are crying for Police. They will be pleased when they behold you and your brave sepoys."

"What is it at Dhurumter?" asked the havildar. "The order was not clear to us, but some word there was of a steam launch and robbers. For God's sake tell me what has happened."

"It is a great word," replied Kesho. "Such a thing has never been known. It is Kesho Naik who has committed these crimes. He obtained a steam launch, and with armed men he plundered

every ship in Bombay harbour, and now are they looting at Dhurumter. It were best that you hurry. There is promotion and high reward when you catch Kesho Naik. Salaam, havildar-ji."

Then the havildar with great hope of good fortune ran to overtake his men who had marched on; and Kesho when he passed out of hearing stood still and laughed.

And when the Hirakot Police arrived at Dhurumter and found no pirate launch but only Police from Bombay who were very angry and abusing the people, they too became angry; and many abuses were interchanged between the two parties of Police. The people too became angry and gave abuses, and they were saying that the zoolum was not of Kesho Naik, but of the Police, and then there was some beating of the people. And so arose such confusion that it might have been said that if Kesho comes the ghur-bhur cannot be more than this. For it is known that when the Sahibs of the Police are present the Police are quiet; but in their absence who can say what they will not do?

CHAPTER X

PIRACY ON THE HIGH SEAS

Now I have to write about the steamer from Goa, and the wickedness and daring of this shameless one. The name of the steamer was the *Kandalika*. There were several hundred passengers on board, all our country people; and the captain and the engineers were also of our people, for there were no European officers employed on these steamers. And the sea being somewhat troubled the passengers were for the most part suffering from sickness; and the groaning and weeping of these was heavy. At Rewa where the *Kandalika* put in at the break of day the six men whom Kesho had sent there beforehand took tickets and joined the steamer. About three quarters of an hour later the *Kandalika* dropped anchor off Hirakot, and several large sailing boats came from the shore with

passengers. In one of these were Kesho's five men who had been arrested, with handcuffs on their wrists and chains on their ankles, and a Police guard of ten men in charge of them. Kesho took his place in this boat ; and he looked at the prisoners and they looked at him, but though they understood that something was intended, not a word was passed between them. At length the sailing boats reached the ship ; and with much shouting and struggling, for on account of the roughness of the sea the boats could not without difficulty lie alongside the *Kandalika,* all the passengers came on board. Other passengers whose destination was Hirakot clambered down into the sailing boats, which at once departed for the shore ; and the anchor being raised the *Kandalika* set off for Bombay.

How I, Krishna, am to record the villainies that were now to be perpetrated by this rogue is not known. If in the writing there be mistakes this humble one may be pardoned. The beginning was on this wise. The five prisoners and the Police guard had taken a position on the upper deck. All were sitting except one sentry, who

was standing, though not easily, by reason of the motion of the ship. Most of the Police, and the prisoners also, were already sea-sick. Kesho and his fourteen men, however, being accustomed to the sea, were in no way affected. Kesho had already directed that as soon as the *Kandalika* was well on her way two of his men should stand over the captain with loaded pistols, and two over the engineer, and inform these officers that if they interfered in any way they would instantly be shot. To the others of his band he had given orders that upon a signal they should with himself instantly fall upon the Police. The men who were to intimidate the captain and the engineer had already separated from the rest in order to effect this purpose; while Kesho and the remaining ten were sitting close to the Police and their prisoners. The men were intently watching for the signal; and the prisoners too, though nothing had been said to them, understood that something would be attempted. The Police, as is the custom of Police, suspected nothing.

"Now!" shouted Kesho, springing up like a

bullet from a gun; and he and his men with shouts and yells hurled themselves upon the Police, who were taken entirely unawares. The attack was so sudden and unexpected that the Police, suffering as they were from sea-sickness, were at great disadvantage. Kesho himself dashed at the sentry, and laying hold of his gun with one hand struck him a heavy blow on the face with the other. The sentry was a strong man and also courageous, and seizing Kesho with his arms he swung him this way and that. Both were struggling and fighting furiously, when impeded by the rolling of the ship they fell on the deck with a crash. In a moment Kesho was on his feet again, and with the constable's gun he struck him so violent a blow on the head that he fell stunned. The other Police, notwithstanding the suddenness of the onslaught, resisted stoutly; they gave blows with guns, and some shots were fired, but the bullets fell harmlessly into the sea. The shouting and the din and tumult were such as cannot be written. But Kesho's men being the attackers had the advantage; and the prisoners too helped them, for with their handcuffs they

gave blows to such Police as had fallen, and seizing by the legs those who were standing they pulled them down. On both sides injuries were received. Kesho all the time was encouraging his men, and giving Shahbash, and himself showering blows wherever they might be needed. In the end the Police were overpowered, and their weapons taken from them; and Kesho's men, standing over them with loaded pistols, threatened to shoot if they did not keep quiet. Without loss of time the handcuffs and chains were taken off the five prisoners, and put upon the ten Police, the right hand of one man and the left hand of another being handcuffed together, and the fetters for the legs being applied in the same way. A guard was placed over these luckless ones; and by the release of the prisoners five men were added to Kesho's strength, which now, with himself, amounted to twenty men. The *Kandalika* was in his power, and he could do with her whatever he wished. And he was mightily pleased.

"Now am I an admiral of the sea," he exclaimed. "Shall it not be said that Kesho is

another Tulaji Angria? We will capture ships, and make a fleet, and rule over the water."

And his men gave great flatteries and praise, and Kesho's heart swelled. And he ordered that the steamer should proceed slowly while it was considered what should next be done; and he bade the captain provide food. He also made him open his safe, and he took all that it contained, which was two hundred and fifty rupees, more or less. The captain was distraught with terror, and was weeping and wringing his hands by reason of this tyranny. But fearing for his life he was helpless. And of the passengers the only thought was that they themselves might be spared.

Now Kesho, who having made several journeys in these steamers was acquainted with all their arrangements, knew that every morning, half way between Hirakot and Bombay, the steamer going north passed the steamer that was going south; and he was looking for the steamer from Bombay. And when he saw the smoke from the funnel in the distance he said, "That vessel must be seized." Then he gave orders to the captain to put up such flags as would cause the other

steamer, which was named the *Roha,* to stop; and he threatened if he played any trick that he would instantly be shot. This then was done; and the steam of the *Kandalika* was shut off so that she might appear to be unable to proceed. Such was the craftiness of Kesho.

"What has befallen the *Kandalika?*" said the captain of the *Roha* in great surprise, when the two steamers were near to each other, and he saw that the *Kandalika* had stopped, and was flying signals of distress. When he was within hailing distance of the *Kandalika* he too stopped his engines; and the two vessels lying alongside of each other he shouted out to ask what had taken place. It was the good fortune of Kesho that by this time the wind had abated, and the roughness of the sea was less.

"Your ship is my prize!" shouted Kesho in reply. "Am not I Kesho Angria, the admiral of the sea? If you move without my permission you will be shot."

And to prove that this was no idle threat three of his men by his order fired guns that they had taken from the Police against the side of the

Roha, and there was heard the ping of the bullets upon the iron plates. But the captain of the *Roha* thought that his safety lay in instant flight; so he ordered his engineer to start the ship, and the screw began to revolve in the water.

"Fire, but not to kill!" roared Kesho to three more of his men. Crack went the guns, and the bullets riddled the woodwork on the deck. "Now will you stop?" shouted Kesho to the captain, "or will you lose your life?"

So the captain of the *Roha,* in deadly terror, and not understanding if he were alive or dead, again stopped; and his ship was at the mercy of Kesho.

"Now send your boat," said Kesho, and with difficulty this was done. Then Kesho with two men entered the boat, and were conveyed to the *Roha,* other of his men directing their guns towards her in readiness to fire should any resistance be attempted. Then Kesho climbed up the deck, and placed one man with a pistol over the captain, and another over the engineer; and then he had possession of the two ships. He also forced the captain of the *Roha* to give up all the cash that

he had in his safe, which amounted to a hundred rupees. Then he gave this order, that the *Roha* was to accompany the *Kandalika* to the south, keeping within range of his guns ; and he himself returned to the *Kandalika*, leaving his two men on the *Roha* with directions to shoot if there were any disobedience. No sooner was Kesho again on board the *Kandalika* than steam was put on to both vessels, the *Kandalika* turning round to the south, and keeping on the shore side of the *Roha*. And so, close together, the steamers moved in the direction of Hirakot. The terror that was felt by the two captains and the engineers, who did not know what their fate might be, cannot be described. The catastrophe that had occurred was so terrible and amazing that their brains reeled ; and the cries and groans of the passengers were past belief. For how could such calamities occur under the British Raj ? Kesho for his part was in the extremity of joy ; and his men shouted, " Kesho Naik ki jai ! Kesho ki jai ! "

Boom ! boom ! suddenly resounded over the water ; and the smoke of great cannon rose into the sky. For there was one thing that Kesho

had forgotten, and that was that while these piracies were going on the vessels were not far distant from the island of Kenhery, where there was a great lighthouse to guide ships into Bombay harbour at night. On this island a look-out was kept. In charge of the lighthouse was a Sahib; but his work was at night and his rest by day, and when all this confusion began he was sleeping. But his men, observing the unusual occurrence that the one steamer had made signals of distress, and then fired at the other, and that a boat had been sent, aroused him from his sleep and reported these strange things. Then the Sahib in astonishment at what they said got up and took his durbin (telescope), and looking at the *Kandalika* he could see that on the deck there were Police who appeared to be prisoners, while a boat conveyed to the *Roha* men who climbed on board and threatened the officers with pistols.

"What the devil is the meaning of this?" he exclaimed. "Is it mutiny? There can't be mutiny on two steamers at once! Good God, it must be piracy. I will call up Bombay ek dum (at once)." And he used many oaths. Then he

ordered his men to fire the great signal guns which could be heard at Bombay, in order to attract attention. After some delay in bringing gunpowder from the stores this was done; and it was the boom! boom! of these cannon that Kesho heard. The Sahib too ran up signal flags, which with a durbin could be seen from the pilot-ship at the mouth of Bombay harbour, to inform the officers that there had been piracy on the high seas, and to request that a gun-boat should be sent at once. This signal was repeated by the pilot-ship to the ships of war. Upon this extraordinary news there was much wonderment; but in the despatch of a gun-boat there was not a moment's delay. There was also great joy at the chance of interchanging shots and blows.

"Hope the beggar will fight, whoever he is," said one young officer to another as they were getting up the anchor of the *Albatross*.

"Hope so," said the officer addressed, "but I don't expect any such luck. He'll make a bolt of it, more likely, like those devils up the Gulf."

Information was also sent to the Police office, and there too the astonishment was great.

"What on earth is up?" said the Burra Police Sahib. "Yesterday some budmashes (scoundrels) on a launch make a murderous attack on the captain of the *Bella Flora* and rob him of the ship's money, after decoying the officers away; then they play old Harry with the Police launch, and steam away up the Dhurumter river. Finally they and their launch disappear into thin air without leaving the faintest trace behind them. And now there is piracy on the high seas off Kenhery, and a gun-boat gone in pursuit. What next, I wonder!" And when report was made to the Burra Sahib of Bombay, he said, "This must be the work of Kesho Naik who came to the Durbar. Certainly that man ought to be among my officers."

At Hirakot too the amazement was great, for when the sailing boats with passengers for the *Roha* put out to meet her she did not stop, but steamed past; and the *Kandalika* which had left for Bombay had returned with her. Thus at all places was there consternation.

"Arhe Baba! what word is this?" said Kesho when he heard the boom of the cannon. And he

held a pistol to the head of the captain, and bade him explain the meaning of the guns and the signals. So, fearing for his life, he told the truth; and Kesho understood that a gun-boat with English sailors could reach that place in the space of one hour, and that she would carry cannon with which she could sink the ship.

"In an hour much may be done," said Kesho. "There is a time to fight, and a time to fly. How fast does this gun-boat travel?" he asked the captain.

"Twelve miles in the hour is the speed of the *Albatross*," was the reply.

"And the *Kandalika*, what is her speed?"

"Ten miles in the hour," answered the captain.

"And Bankot is forty miles from here?"

"It may be two and forty miles," the captain replied.

"It is good," said Kesho. "In four hours we shall reach that place. The gun-boat will take three hours and a half from here, but there is yet one hour before she can come so far from Bombay. We shall arrive at Bankot half an

hour before the gun-boat. Then will the laugh be on our side. Keep full steam."

So along the coast steamed at their greatest speed Kesho's fleet, consisting of the *Kandalika* and the *Roha,* while, ten miles behind, the *Albatross* was using every exertion to overtake the pirate. The sea was now quite calm, and sparkling in the bright sunshine, and when the palm-trees on the shore and the green hills behind them were seen, how could it be thought that this was not a voyage of pleasure rather than an occasion of robbery and armed rebellion ? Kesho too had distributed most of the rupees which he had plundered amongst the passengers of the *Kandalika,* and he promised to land them safely at Bankot ; so their minds became at ease, and they shouted, " Kesho Naik ki jai." And Kesho and his men took food at leisure, for they said, " God knows when we may eat again."

" There they are ! Two of them ! " said the young officer on the *Albatross* to his companion a couple of hours later. " We are gaining on them fast. We ought to pick them up before we get as far as Bankot. I wonder what their little

game is ? Shall we fire a gun to let them know we're coming ? "

" No need to waste His Majesty's powder and shot," was the reply. " If we can see them they can see us."

" There is the gun-boat," said the captain of the *Kandalika* to Kesho, as he looked through his telescope.

And the captain was afraid, for he said in his heart, " When the *Albatross* comes up there will be fighting, and what shall be our fate ? "

" Some day I too will possess many gun-boats," said Kesho, " and have full command of the sea. Now something has been learnt, and we have shown what may be done. There will come a great day. But keep on more steam. What word is this ? "

For Kesho perceived that the *Kandalika* was falling behind the *Roha*. And at that moment Ismail, the young engineer who had been employed on the steam launch, came running to Kesho in great excitement.

" Sahib ! Sahib ! " he exclaimed, " the coal is finished. They were to take coal at Bombay."

"Stop the *Roha!*" said Kesho in a moment. "All shout together, and wave puggries. Guns too may be fired."

These orders were instantly complied with; but in fact Kesho's men on the *Roha* had already perceived that the *Kandalika* was lagging behind, and had ordered steam to be reduced.

"Bring both steamers side by side, and then shut off steam," said Kesho.

The sea being smooth this order was soon carried out. Then Kesho summoned before him the engineer of the *Kandalika*, and the poor wretch came trembling.

"Why did you not inform me before that the coal was less, you vile son of a vile father?" roared Kesho.

Then seeing that the man could only weep and fold his hands Kesho bade his men give him many blows until he became senseless.

The *Roha* having only left Bombay that morning there was much coal on board of her; but for the carrying of coal from one ship to the other there was no time, the *Albatross* being now only some five miles distant. So Kesho with all

his men moved on to the *Roha,* taking the captain of the *Kandalika* with him. Then the *Kandalika* was left, and the *Roha* proceeded alone.

"There has been delay," said Kesho; "but for the gun-boat there will also be delay." This however was to be seen.

"What's up now?" said the young officer on the *Albatross,* as he looked through his glass. "Both have stopped, and they are tied together. We shall soon have them now. Hope they'll put up a fight."

"Look at that," said his companion a few minutes later. "One has gone on, and the other seems to have emptied her bunkers. I can't wait for her. The sea is dead calm and the tide running out. She can drift about till we catch the other beggar. She won't come to any harm. Our men are evidently on the other boat."

By reason of this delay the *Albatross* was considerably nearer to the *Roha,* and each was steaming furiously. Kesho's intention was if possible to arrive first at Bankot, for he had his plan concerning what was then to be done. But it was in his mind, if he saw that there was

no chance to avoid his pursuer with English sailors and guns before reaching that port, to run the steamer ashore anywhere on the sandy beach, and make escape into the country. And so mile after mile went by, the *Albatross* and the *Roha* pouring masses of black smoke from their funnels as the heat of the furnaces became greater. Mile by mile the *Albatross* was drawing nearer, but not so rapidly, for the *Roha* could steam faster than the *Kandalika,* and whether there would be escape or capture was not yet determined.

"Let her have all she can take, if she busts," said the officer on the *Albatross.*

"Put on more coal, more, more, more!" shouted Kesho on the *Roha.*

And now the landing-place at Bankot was full in sight of both vessels. The *Roha* was only half a mile away from this refuge and the *Albatross* was still two miles behind her. But two miles could be accomplished in ten minutes; and thus was Kesho's fate balanced on the point of a needle. Ten minutes were little enough for what was to be done.

"Listen," said Kesho to his men. "This is my order. It is known that at Bankot the river Savitri flows into the sea. Every day when the ag-boat from Bombay arrives there is a steam launch in readiness to take passengers thirty miles up the river to Dasgaum. This launch will meet the steamer as soon as we reach the mouth of the river. She is to be seized instantly, and Jiwan and Balaji with pistols will stand over the tindal (officer) and the engineer. We must all spring on to the launch as the cheetah leaps on to the deer, and we take with us the captains of the *Kandalika* and the *Roha*, and also three women from among the passengers. The women shall be given money later on. These fools of Sahibs on the *Albatross* will not fire guns at us if they see that there are women on board. Then we steam up the river. The launch is shallow in the water, and can proceed in safety to Dasgaum; but the gun-boat is deep, and if she passes further than one mile at low tide she will run aground. Herein lies the way of safety. From Dasgaum are there many paths to the mountains. But if any difficulty is encountered we must swim ashore

as best we can, and take to flight in different directions."

"Hulloh! She is making for Bankot. She is turning in," said the younger officer on the *Albatross*. "Now we shall have her. She can't get away."

"Ever been here before?" said the other. "I have. I see their plan. They mean to desert the ship and go up the river in the passenger launch. Deuced smart of them. With luck we'll just stop their little game. Fire a shot to give them a hint that we mean business and that they had better surrender."

Whiz! went a cannon ball, and then another; but the *Roha* was close in now; and there was great wonder on the launch which was lying in readiness, for the steamer usually came in slowly, but here was the *Roha* approaching at full speed, regardless of danger, and another ship behind her firing cannon. And the wonder changed to consternation when the *Roha*, after backing furiously, dropped her anchor close beside the launch, and a grappling rope was thrown on to the launch which caught fast to an iron rail, and so she was

dragged to the side of the steamer. As the lightning leaps from the cloud five men instantly sprang on board of her from the *Roha,* two of whom seized the tindal and two the engineer and bade them obey orders else would they lose their lives, while one with a grappling hook held on to the ladder of the *Roha,* which had been already let down. Before one might say Shiv, Shiv, all was completed as had been arranged and the launch was started at full speed up the river.

"Now," said Kesho to the tindal who was steering the launch, "keep her as near to one side as may be without running aground, so that the gun-boat cannot come close. If you touch ground you will be shot."

Trembling with fear the tindal obeyed; and but a few minutes after the launch the *Albatross* steamed at full speed into the river. So continued this unequalled voyage of adventure. The gun-boat had greater speed than the launch, but her officers were not acquainted with the channel, and it was not known to them what rocks and shoals might be met with. But it was understood that deep water in which the *Albatross*

might proceed did not extend much further than one mile. Thus on what might happen in a short time the issue depended. Would fortune still favour this audacious pirate and rebel, or would the gun-boat be able to bring him to the justice which had long waited for this evil one?

"Put the last inch of steam into the cylinders," said the captain of the *Albatross*. "It's now or never for these devils. Send another shot alongside the beggar." So the steam roared through the pipes, and the whistle too was sounded furiously, and cannon balls whizzed alongside the launch; and Kesho for his part also sounded his whistle in defiance, and discharged muskets, the bullets striking the side of the gun-boat.

"I'd sink the beggar straight away," said the captain of the *Albatross*, "but what can we do with those women on board? We must get alongside and pick off the leaders."

By the end of a mile the gun-boat and the launch were side by side, the former keeping in the middle of the river for safety, and the latter venturing close to the side in the shallower water. Then Kesho with his craftiness and guile

made all lie down out of harm's way except the tindal and the engineer. Over the tindal he himself stood, holding a pistol ; and over the engineer stood Jiwan with another pistol ; and Kesho and Jiwan each held a woman in front of him. And Kesho shouted abuse at the gun-boat, while the women were crying and screaming with fear.

"We must risk running aground," said the captain of the *Albatross*. "Take her alongside the beggar, and grapple him. It's our only chance. We daren't shoot, and we can't get much further up this stream."

So this desperate race was continued ; and the *Albatross* coming close to the gun-boat a rope with a hook was thrown, but Kesho bade the tindal put the helm on one side, and by this stratagem the rope fell short. Then the men of the *Albatross* flung another rope which was like to fall on the deck, when in a moment there was a crash, and the keel of the gun-boat grated on the gravelly bottom of the river, and she came to a dead stop, her deck sloping heavily to one side. Her steam was instantly shut off, and she lay helpless until the tide should rise.

" Salaam, Sahib," cried Kesho as he steamed away ; " this has been a great tamasha ! " And the Sahibs said " Goddam ! " after the manner of the English.

This then was the ending of this villainy. Kesho had rescued his five men ; he had seized and held three steamers, including the launch on the Savitri. He had beaten the captain of the *Bella Flora,* and he had defied the Police in the harbour and an English gun-boat at sea. And reaching Dasgaum in safety he rewarded the women ; and leaving the captains of the *Kandalika* and the *Roha* to their own devices he and his men proceeded quietly into the fastnesses of the mountains. Such an one was Kesho Naik.

CHAPTER XI

THE MIRACULOUS ESCAPE OF KRISHNA AND THE AMAZING CAPTURE OF KESHO NAIK

As the days went on the power of Kesho Naik became greater. Men said, "Shiwaji has in truth come again; and he has taken the government into his own hands." The anger of the Sirkar was heavy at all the outrages and evil deeds that this lawless one committed. And the Police and the soldiers were distracted, for the work was as of those who would capture the wind. When they followed him to the north, behold he perpetrated some infamy in the south; and when they pursued him to the east he set the countryside ablaze in the west. Not even the season of rains put a stop to his depredations; and if it was difficult to travel across a flooded country to execute his plunderings and lootings, he and his men would take tickets by the railway, and

carry out their nefarious schemes in the great towns. It is to be remembered that in every place Kesho possessed friends; for the people admired his daring, and while for the most part they looked upon him as their benefactor, not a few worshipped him as an incarnation of Vishnoo. This too may be said, that if the behaviour of a rich man was discreet, and he cared for the poor, he had nothing to fear from Kesho. But who shall count the grains of gold in the superfluity of dross? For was it not for the most part found that the rich waxed fat, and gave no heed to the tears of the poor? To us Police the very name of Kesho became a terror. Let him take us, and kill us, if he will, said we, so only this endless marching hither and thither may cease, and this hunger and misery be abated. If he were indeed the protector of the poor, did that make less our misfortunes? Had he the virtues of the Rishis, and the justice of Rama, were we the less heavily troubled? Were we never to have rest? How could we fulfil our days? If even Trench Sahib ceased to laugh, and no jest came from his lips, and more than before he said Goddam, what could

we humble ones do? And in these straits some even of the Police were making arrangements with Kesho.

And I, Krishna, was distraught at all these misfortunes, and I cursed the day on which I was born, and I looked for the day when I should die and my body be burnt. If it was my fate that I should enter the service of the Police why should I not be left alone like some others to take four annas here and accept four annas there, and so enjoy quietness and ease? But then I considered that this would not be pleasing to Carruthers Sahib and Trench Sahib; and I understood that it was my fate to bring this Kesho to the justice which he had so long eluded. If but Trench Sahib had avoided foolishness and shot this miscreant when he was in his hands! Then should we have avoided all these troubles. At the last there came to me some understanding; and I knew that I, Krishna, must once more, unaided, discover this Shaitan; and this time the shooting would not be deferred. With this thought the burden became less. And I stood before Trench Sahib, and I made petition.

"Sahib," I requested, "for one month leave may be granted. From the mouth of this humble one there shall go out no lie. There is no word that my father is dead, or the aunt of my brother-in-law is sick. The Sahib can see this slave's condition, that in the hardship of service his skin is dried and his bones protrude. No longer can this suffering be endured. And until Kesho is seized there is no hope of life. Leave for one month may be granted; and in some way shall I, Krishna, find the path of Kesho. Then shall there be shooting; and the land may have rest."

So the Sahib wrote in the book that leave for one month from the 7th day of January was sanctioned for Krishna, the son of Balaram; and I left my uniform and my gun, and made salaam, and departed. For my expenses I had twenty rupees. I was at no trouble to disguise myself, for in my mind was this thought: I would travel this way and that and speak openly about the justice of Kesho, the exalter of the destitute and the refuge of the poor, and let all know that I, Krishna, by reason of the zoolum of the Sahibs, have broken from the Police and seek the service

of Kesho. By these means should I at last light upon some of the followers of Kesho who for ever were spying out the country; and I should feign to accept his service, and so learn when and where he might be found. If need be I was ready to swear any oath on heaven or hell, on Ganges water or the cow's tail, and as ready to break it; for the foolishness of Trench Sahib was a heavy burden, seeing that an oath to such a faithless one is but as a noose wherewith to catch a tiger.

Where should I first direct my steps? This was in truth a question to be asked of Gunesh, the god of wisdom. The god Gunesh! Yes, with the name of Gunesh was inspiration given to this slave. And I walked many days until I came to a village where was a temple cut in stone and dedicated to the elephant-headed god. And for three days I bowed my head and did pooja (prayer) at the shrine. Then the priest seeing me said:

"Son, thou art in trouble. Speak what thy mind biddeth thee."

"In truth," I said, "Oh Goorooji, this dust of the earth is in trouble. And the prayer to the

god is that my footsteps may be guided to Kesho Naik."

"Kesho Naik?" said the priest. "Is this not he whom they call the second Shiwaji? Behold, the god has spoken; thou hast leave to depart."

With this the priest left me, and there was no further word. What was this answer which was no answer? Was it not rather a mockery and scoffing? But at length there came enlightenment. For what cause had the priest asked whether Kesho were not called the second Shiwaji? Was the answer of illumination concealed in this web of darkness? Where would Shiwaji have been found when he was one day at Surat and another at Hoobli? Then the meaning became clear. Shiwaji, when his pre-eminence was assured, held his court and enjoyed dignity on one of the ancient forts which crown the hills of the Western Ghauts. Did he not first capture Torna from the Moghuls? Was it not at Pertabghur that he slew Afzul Khan, and routed the army of Bijapur? Did he not maintain his state for some time at Rajguhr and finally at Raiguhr

when he was crowned as Rajah? This then was the word of Gunesh. On some one or other of the old forts Kesho must have made his head quarters. This was what I had to seek. Yet if there were forts and battlements on a hundred hill-tops where should I make a beginning? But I reflected that if Gunesh had opened the path would he not continue to hold the lamp of guidance? In the end it came to me that I would first proceed to Raiguhr where Shiwaji was crowned and where at last he died. To this place then I made my way; and it is to be said that it is not greatly distant from Dasgaum on the river Savitri, where Kesho left the steam launch after he had seized the *Kandalika* and the *Roha*, and defied the gun-boat *Albatross*. This vast fortress of Raiguhr lifts its head into the sky; and the ascent was one of incredible heaviness to one whose limbs were already weary from endless marching. At length after many hours' labour I passed by the great gateway through the massive walls that encircle the summit. Here are still standing some of the palaces built by Shiwaji, and here is the stone platform where they made

his funeral pyre. And it could be seen that not so long ago Kesho and his band had passed some days here; for there were metal cooking-pots, and earthen jars of water lying about, and a great crucible for the melting of gold and silver ornaments. But now was the place uninhabited save by foxes and jackals. So by the evening I descended from this ancient citadel to the plains below. And on the height, the month being Magh, the cold was extreme.

For a day I rested on account of the fatigue, and then I walked northward until I came to the hill of Rajguhr. Raiguhr is in a district of the Sirkar, but Rajguhr is in the State of Roha, whose chief, Baji Rao, was cheated by Kesho in the matter of the Durbar. Was it here that Kesho had taken up his abode, to avoid the interference of the Sirkar's Police? But when I climbed the precipitous hill on which stood the fort, it was as desolate as had been Raiguhr. It was in my mind, however, that Gunesh would guide me; and I was not cast down. And I considered that next I would proceed to Torna, the first fort out of many that Shiwaji seized and

held. So I descended the rugged mountain, picking my way cautiously and warily; and I was to seek a night's rest in a neighbouring hamlet.

"Arhe! Krishna, how goes it? Was there aught to see on Rajguhr?" said a voice as I reached the foot of the hill. I was lost in amazement that there was any here who knew me by name; and looking about in the growing darkness I recognised one Gungadeen who was a constable in Trench Sahib's company of Police. I distrusted this man; and my mind misgave me that he were at this place for no good end.

"Do not look so surprised," he continued; "I heard your request for leave, and I too obtained one month for the same purpose. I set out two days after you, and travelling across the mountains I by chance came to this place. By a lucky fortune we have met; and we can spy out the whereabouts of this Shaitan together."

Whether this story were true, or in fact Gundageen had followed my movements, was not to be known; but my heart was heavy that this man had joined me. However, I had no reason to

advance for refusing his offer of companionship, and I spoke sweet words and expressed my pleasure at our good fortune in meeting. So we proceeded in company, walking slowly, for the hills were steep and rugged, and roads there were none. And on the third evening we came near the fort of this great peak of Torna ; and behold, it could be seen that in the fort upon the summit lights were burning. Then I perceived that in truth Gunesh had directed my steps to the citadel of this prince of rebels ; and I should hasten to Trench Sahib and let him bring white soldiers and guns. But yet the decision of prudence should not be made empty by the rashness of haste ; and more certainty was needed. And Gungadeen and I considered that we would find shelter for the night, and make inquiries in the morning. To this end we followed a path which led to some poor huts, when suddenly three men with guns sprang out from behind a bush, and behold, we two were prisoners.

" Whence come ye ? " said one of the men, who seemed to be the leader. " Who are ye that are spying here in the limits of Kesho Maharaj ? "

Then I understood that these men were in the service of Kesho, and that they were guarding the approaches to the fort. And my heart became lighter, for this was what I had sought. Let there be what there might, by some means I would send word to Trench Sahib.

"We are two sepoys of Police," I replied. "The truth is not to be hidden. The work of the Sirkar is a heavy burden, and the reward is small. And having heard the name of Kesho we have broken from the tyranny and injustice of the Police, and are come to take service with the protector of the poor. If permission be given we may present ourselves before him."

"Your words are sweet," said the man who had addressed us; "but who shall know if they are true or false? The order of the Maharaj is that any stranger spying here shall be guarded, and placed before the presence; thus will your request be fulfilled. Ye have come on a fortunate day, for to-morrow is the crowning. Now will we ascend the royal fort."

"The day is indeed fortunate," I replied; "but we are exhausted from walking, and oppressed

with hunger and thirst ; and how shall we accomplish this ascent without rest and refreshment ?''

" Oho ! " said the man, " I thought that your story was false. You would somehow find means of escape. But we men of Kesho are not like you fools of Police. We let not our prisoners get away.''

Then I protested many times that our words were true ; and in the end the man bade us sit down on the ground, and gave us some boiled rice and a few bananas from his wallet, and water from his leathern bottle, and so our strength revived and we blessed him for his kindness. Then we were set to climbing this mountain. Lest we should attempt to escape, ropes were securely tied round our waists, and held by our captors, one of whom walked in front of us and two behind. At the very foot of the hill we came upon a guard of ten armed men, one of whom was standing on sentry duty ; and with the commander of the guard the men who had seized us held conversation. Thus I saw what precautions were taken by Kesho, and that we should want many men and guns to capture this fortress.

And as we weary ones continued to climb, at several places there were more guards. In the darkness we could scarce do more than feel our way; and it may have been two hours before at last we came to a great battlement, and a massive gate which was closed. Here too was a guard stationed. After some questioning the officer of this guard took a key and opened a small door contained in the great gate; and we, by stooping low, entered into the precincts of Kesho. What a sight it was that then met our eyes! A circle of men who held flaming torches surrounded a large shamiana, or tent with roof only and no sides. In the centre was a couch ornamented with rich and elegant coverings, and on this reclined Kesho, who was wearing splendid robes that gleamed with jewels; and around him stood, or sat on the ground, his chosen councillors. And all were watching the movements of nautch girls, while there was music of zithers and tambours. To us coming from the blackness of without how dazzling was this brilliant spectacle! Then word of our presence was passed to Kesho. Without looking round he

gave an order, and we were instantly led away through a dark passage and thrown into a cell cut out of the solid rock. Bread and water were given to us, and the door of the cell was closed. And not knowing our fate we wearied ones slept, and so the night passed. But if what was to happen on the morrow had been unfolded, weariness or no weariness, the solace of sleep could not have been vouchsafed to this poor constable of Police.

In the morning the door of our prison was opened, and again food and drink were provided. And after we had partaken of refreshment there came this surprise. A messenger from Kesho entered, bearing change of clothing; and he brought this message:

"Krishna and Gungadeen, servants of the English Sirkar, it is good that officers of the Police have come on this day. The coronation will be at the third hour. At this ceremony good clothes should be worn; and those which are sent may be accepted. On the conclusion of the crowning honours will be conferred, and petitions may be represented."

What was in my mind how can I say? What did this robber propose to himself? To what limits had his audacity attained? Had this miscreant no thought of the arm of the Sirkar that he should call himself a king? But the end was not yet to be seen; and it was necessary to avoid disobedience of this madman's orders. So we, Gungadeen and I, prepared ourselves for the occasion; and we bathed, and wore the robes, and even a barber was provided, and our faces were made clean. And at the third hour we were called to the audience. Then what happened was not to be believed. Kesho was seated on a magnificent throne beneath the shamiana; and there was formed a procession of his notables. These advanced slowly towards him with many obeisances; and halting when they drew nigh to his feet, the foremost held a parchment covered with many devices, and read out his titles thus:—

"Kesho Maharaj, the second Shiwaji, the illustrious, the pinnacle of wisdom and power, the representative of Vishnoo, the conqueror of enemies, the defender of religion, the keeper of the people, the protector of the poor, Chuttra-

putti, Lord of the Umbrella, is this day accorded the crown of authority, and his order only shall be obeyed in the land."

Then with the waving of banners and the shouting of the people a golden crown was placed upon Kesho's head; and he, standing up but saying no word, held out his hands in token of blessing; and all cried, "Kesho Maharaj ki jai." Next were garlands of flowers and sweet perfumes distributed; and after that the notables were presented and were accorded titles. Balaji the Brahmin was created Nyayadesh or chief justice, Jiwan was made Sir Lushkar or head of the army, and Mahdu was appointed controller of the treasury; and others too received honours and titles, such as cannot be remembered. When this was completed Balaji stepped forth and called out:

"Great is the justice of Kesho Maharaj. If there are any petitioners let them come forward."

Then I understood that this was my appointed time; and I advanced with folded hands, and made prostration, and requested that I was a

sepoy who had broken away from the tyranny of the Police, and having heard the name of Kesho Maharaj I had come to seek service in his august employ.

Who could say what astonishing thing was then to happen ? Hardly had the words left my mouth than this son of abominable parents, Gungadeen, came past me and said :

" These words are lies and falsehood. This man is a cheat, and a knave. He is a spy of Police, and he only seeks how he may betray this mighty one. With these ears I heard him ask for one month's leave that he might discover the path for the capture of this incarnation of righteousness."

" What hast thou to say ? " asked Kesho of this humble one, in a terrible voice.

And while I was about to reply with such words as might favour me, this thrice accursed Gungadeen continued :

" What has this faithless one to say ? This is Krishna, the son of Balaram, and he is the most trusted councillor of Trench Sahib. It was he who entrapped the great one at Pimpalwada,

and put the handcuffs on the wrist of the Maharaj. Let him be asked if he can deny it ! "

And seeing I could not deny these things I held my peace.

Then came the voice of Kesho in thunder.

" This is the punishment of the faithless one. He shall be hurled down the crag of offenders. But that no one may say that Kesho is not merciful he may retain his life until the sun sets this day, and make his peace with Yum (the god of death)."

Then was I again hurled into the cell that was cut out of the living rock ; and the bitterness of death was upon me. Full well I knew what was the crag of offenders. For, it may be, a thousand cubits, the descent from the summit of the mountain to the plain below was on the western side perpendicular. Is it not recorded in the histories how at Raiguhr Shiwaji used to have offenders hurled down such a precipice ? Is it not known that at Seringapatam in Mysore the great Tippoo Sahib made a custom of treating in this way the white soldiers who were captured by his armies ? And in a few hours I was to be dashed headlong

down the abyss, my body to be shattered into fragments and to be devoured by vultures and jackals.

God knows how the time passed by. The minutes were as hours, and the hours as years. I reflected on the wickedness of this evil one; and in vain I considered some way of escape. At length the door of the cell was opened, and I was dragged out to this death of deaths.

The sun was setting; and in a half circle facing the edge of the cliff stood Kesho and his councillors, and behind them a double rank of men. Through this line a way was made for this victim; and I was left standing, unbound, Kesho and his robbers on the one side of me, and on the other death. Behind Kesho stood a retainer who held over him a large chuttri or umbrella, this being with us people a sign of sovereignty; and close to this man were several of the nautch girls who had been dancing the previous evening. As I threw my eyes upon this assembly in whose presence I was to die, they met the gaze of one of these nautch girls; and in her glance I read some strange meaning. Did it signify hope?

Was she at the last moment to intercede on my behalf? Or was it merely sympathy for my cruel fate? Even so it was not unwelcome. Kesho for his part wore on his countenance a devilish scowl; but after a while his expression relaxed, and he laughed a laugh of scorn.

"Fear not," he said, "no one shall lay hands on thee, be-iman. Thou art free to go and pay thy respects to Trench Sahib. The way is open to thee."

And slowly, little by little, the half circle advanced towards me; and I understood that they would gradually draw nearer until I was forced to fall over the precipice. And then into my mind there flashed this thought. I would fulfil my fate. I would go, but not alone. I would seize this miscreant in my arms, and with him leap into space. So should the land have peace. Thus my tribulation became less. And I was watching and watching for my opportunity. Imperceptibly the half circle was closing in; so slowly that the movements of these murderers could hardly be seen. Yet this was plain, that the space between me and death was diminishing.

There had been ten cubits between these devils and the edge of the precipice, and now there were but four. Soon must there be an end. But the fear of death had gone from me. My only feeling was joy that in a few moments I should rid the world of its oppressor. Had the occasion arrived? No; I must wait till this Shaitan was closer to the edge, so that with one leap and one bound he should be hurled into the depth in my embrace. Nearer, nearer; now was the time. At the instant that I was about to dash forward and seize him, some perception, I know not what, caused me to look at the nautch girl whose gaze I had met. Again there was a glance of intensity in her eyes; and then with a sudden shriek as though of terror she fell against the bearer of the great umbrella. Startled at this fall of the girl his hold on the chuttri was loosened; and wafted by the evening breeze this royal insignium fell fluttering at my feet. Now I understood what was intended. Now I saw my destiny. In a single instant I seized the handle of the umbrella; I gripped it with all my strength, and with a prayer to Gunesh I threw myself over the precipice.

Then was my soul rent out of my body. I could have shrieked with terror, but my tongue was tied and no sound escaped from my lips. God knows what were my fearful sensations. At the first there was much swaying and swirling of this frail protection which stood between me and death, and held me suspended in mid air. There was a rushing, violent wind, and my ears were filled with strange noises. After a while the oscillation was less, and the chuttri assumed steadiness. Where was I, Krishna? Was I sinking? It did not seem so; it was rather as though I were stationary between heaven and earth, and the mountain side was rising above me in prodigious strides, and towering up as though it would fall upon me and crush me beneath its weight. Then there seemed to float before me visions of Kesho and nautch girls and crownings, and the traitor Gungadeen. One thing I knew as it were in half consciousness, that I must on no account relax my hold. Of the umbrella breaking there was no danger; for the extremities of the covering, which may have been three cubits across, were tied down to the

handle by gold chains. But to this concentration of horrors in which I was entangled there came an added alarm. A great mass dashed against my back, and a sharp weapon pierced my neck; and I perceived that an eagle, jealous of this intrusion on its domains, had attacked me from behind. Then my voice came, and I shrieked aloud in my piteous distress; and the great bird flew away startled at my cry. Still the mountain side seemed to rear itself up, but less rapidly as my strength was becoming weaker; and now there was a difference, for I understood that it was not the mountain that was rising but I who was descending, and I was drawing nigh to the ground. Then a fresh anxiety assailed me. How should I alight? Should I be dashed in pieces on some rock? But the gods befriended this humble one. At the foot of Torna the cliff was hollowed inwards, and beneath the overhanging crag was a deep tank of clear water. A gust of wind caught the chuttri as my perilous descent was well nigh accomplished, and drove me under the hollow; and falling easily and gently into the water I swam ashore. Then I prostrated myself and did

pooja in the name of Gunesh the god of wisdom.

Now it is to be considered that the tank being under the hollow of the cliff it could not be seen from the summit of the mountain; and herein lay my hope of safety. I threw my puggri into the water so that when Kesho's men found the royal umbrella they might think that I was drowned. Then it was for me to achieve safety. Darkness was rapidly coming on, and I had this advantage, that no one on the plain had had warning of my escape, nor could a messenger from above arrive for a long time. This was then my thought, to flee away with what speed I might and avoid any chance meeting of Kesho's guards. So should I bring Trench Sahib with white soldiers and guns to Torna.

All that night I walked; and my fortune was auspicious, for I met none of Kesho's men. By break of day I must have travelled fifteen miles. As the sun rose I could see the great peak of Torna a long way off; and a shudder passed over me as I thought how barely I had escaped a dreadful death. And now I considered that I might be

thirty miles from the station of Ralne; but how was I in my weariness to walk this distance without delay, when each moment was of such consequence? Then again my destiny was favourable, for on a rough country road I met a man driving a bullock-cart, and I offered him three rupees to convey me to Ralne. When he hesitated I promised him five rupees, and I showed him the money, and then he consented. By the evening we were still five miles from Ralne, and the tired bullocks could go no further; so I proceeded on foot. At nine o'clock I was at the station; and I blessed the Sahibs who had brought the fire-wagon to our land. And now where might Trench Sahib be? To what station should I take a ticket? I was about to ask the telegraph clerk to send a message to Lolapur and find out the whereabouts of the Sahib. And then again my good fortune befriended me, for I saw sub-inspector Yar Mahomed on the platform, and I rushed to him, and eagerly asked him where my Sahib was.

"He has taken a week's leave," he replied, "and is now in Bombay. He is staying at the

Palace Hotel. Change of air was needed for his health."

And he asked me many questions, but I would not reply beyond saying that the work was urgent. In the end he stated that he would accompany me to the Sahib; and to this I agreed. Shortly there came a train from Lolapur; and by midnight we reached the great hotel. This was a day of good fortunes; and it was seen that for our perplexities a favourable issue was assured, for as we stood at the steps a carriage drove up and Trench Sahib alighted. Then I requested that I was the bearer of urgent news.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed. "Krishna! This is a good coming! Let us go and talk in my room."

The Sahib reclined on a long cane couch, and a chair was given to Yar Mahomed, while this humble one sat on the floor at the Sahib's feet. And I recounted all that had happened, and the Sahib marvelled. At the end I requested that this is the time without delay to take white soldiers and guns and shoot this rebel and his men, and that if a start were made in the morning

there should be a conclusion of the matter on the third day.

"Wait a minute," said the Sahib, when I had finished my recital; "let me think." And we were silent, and in silence the Sahib smoked many cigarettes.

"Bombay to Ralne sixty miles by rail, and forty-five miles on a cross country," he said at last. "But that way is a crooked one. As the crow flies it would not be more than seventy. Yes. Come to me here in the morning at seven o'clock. Or rather, at eight o'clock be present on the race-course at Mahaluxmi. Rooksat! you have permission to depart."

Then thought I, of a truth the Sahibs are all mad, but Trench Sahib is the most mad of all. When he should give over thoughts of sleep, and busy himself in arranging for soldiers and guns and a special train, he bids us attend at the race course, as if there were no Kesho in the whole world. But there is no way of disobedience when the Sahibs give an order.

So we took food and slept, Yar Mahomed and I; and in the morning we went to the maidan

at Mahaluxmi where horses are raced, the distance from the fort being five miles. And then our liver became water, for here was a wonderful sight. The Sahibs have made fire-wagons and lightning wires, and bicycles that men may ride at speed on two wheels, and motor-gharies which fly along the road as the black buck courses over the desert. But here was the work of gins and peris; for behold, Sahibs were flying round and round high in the air, making great circles and rising and descending at their will in magic air-carriages that were held up by great sails and driven by engines which throbbed and whirred as the cars cleft the air. In some of these magic vehicles there were seated two Sahibs, and in others only one.

While our heads were burning in amazement there came to us Trench Sahib, and said:

"Well, is this a good tamasha?"

And we said, "We have no words. Our speech is dried up." But it was in my mind that this was no time for tamashas.

"Wait a minute," said the Sahib. "You shall see a better tamasha. Come with me."

And we walked across the maidan, and we saw a vast kar-khana or shed with closed doors. And there were white soldiers standing about, some in khaki uniform with guns, and some only in pantaloons and shirts. What should all this mean? Then the doors of the shed were opened, and very slowly there was drawn out a prodigious ship, as it were, of some light texture, to which was suspended a platform on which twenty men might be seated. "What new magic is this?" I considered. And while this monstrous machine was held down by a number of soldiers a great engine was set in motion, and ten soldiers with guns sat on the platform, and Trench Sahib seizing me by the hand took his seat there also, and placed me by his side.

"All aboard, sir?" asked a sergeant who was standing on the maidan.

"All right, let her go!" said Trench Sahib, and in a moment the earth sank beneath us and we were hastening through the sky at the speed of a train as the wheels of the engine revolved and were turning a great fan.

"South-east by east!" said Trench Sahib, and

looking down I saw that we were flying over the harbour and directing our course to the distant hills.

"Is this better than your chuttri?" asked Trench Sahib of me. "As a man can come out so he can go in."

Then I perceived my own folly, and the Sahib's wisdom; and I was abashed and made no reply.

On and on we sped in this carriage of the air; and in two hours from our departure we could plainly see the fort on the summit of Torna. Another half hour and we were close to the battlements. There was the shamiana, and there was a crowd of men staring at this strange monster in the sky, as though they were struck dumb with amazement.

"Ease her," said Trench Sahib, "gently does it; stop her!" and the machine of mystery softly glided on to the level ground beside the shamiana. In an instant six of the soldiers stepped out and held the car by ropes, while the four others, with Trench Sahib and myself, dashed at the newly-crowned king and his councillors. Their consternation was too great for them to offer any

resistance; and in a couple of minutes Kesho, Balaji, Jiwan, Rambhao and two others were handcuffed and thrown on to the platform.

"This is a good meeting," said Trench Sahib to Kesho.

"The meetings of this slave with the Sahib are always agreeable," he replied.

We could do no more at this time, and there was preparation for starting the car, when I saw the traitor Gungadeen, and my heart was inflamed.

"One minute!" I requested the Sahib. "There is still Gungadeen." And I dashed at this son of vile parents. He seeing me, whom he thought to be dead, was stricken with terror. In his haste to save himself from his fate he fled at speed, and not seeing where he planted his feet he fell over the crag where I had descended two days before. One scream the wretch gave as he was plunged into eternity, and so he met his fate.

"Serve him right," said Trench Sahib. "Now, Krishna, jump on quick." So I obeyed. And the soldiers clambering on let go the ropes; and

the car sprang up and cleft the air, and we turned towards Bombay. And at Mahaluxmi there was gathered a great crowd of people to receive us, for the errand of Trench Sahib was known to many; and the high officers gave shahbash to the Sahib and even to this humble one. Thus for the second time was Kesho taken, and he was lodged in the great jail of Bombay.

Note.—At the foot of the stronghold of Raiguhr (known as the Gibraltar of the East) is the village of Chuttri (umbrella) Nizampur, where I occasionally went to inspect a small Police post. On inquiring the origin of the name of the hamlet I was told by the natives that Shiwaji was once about to hurl a prisoner from the citadel when the man seized an umbrella, and using it as a parachute, descended in safety to Nizampur which has been known as Chuttri Nizampur ever since.

CHAPTER XII

THE TRIAL OF KESHO NAIK IN THE HIGH COURT, AND HIS ESCAPE FROM JAIL

Great was the rejoicing of the Police at the capture of Kesho Naik by Trench Sahib in the flying ship. Now should we have rest from this pitiless marching up and down the land. For to dispose of the followers of Kesho when their leader was in captivity or hanged would be no difficult task; they would be but a headless trunk. A strong force was at once sent to scour Torna and the surrounding country, and a few arrests were made, and much treasure that had been concealed in the fort was recovered. By degrees some more of the band were seized; but the remainder either disappeared or returned to their business of cultivation. So the land had peace.

In the end there were twelve prisoners who were to be tried for a multitude of offences.

There was Kesho himself, Balaji, Jiwan and Rambhao, with Ismail the engineer, and seven others. First was the case against these to be inquired into by the chief magistrate; and it was for him, after considering the circumstances to commit the accused to the High Court of Bombay for their trial. The crimes of these rogues had been committed in many different districts, and it was not convenient to conduct the trial for all the cases in any one of them; therefore the arrangement was that all the inquiries and trials should be held in Bombay. For one month after Kesho's arrest no commencement was made, remands being granted from week to week while the Police collected evidence, and gradually completed the number of twelve prisoners. Then was the hearing of the strange charges undertaken by the chief magistrate, and the court was crowded with curious spectators. Before the magistrate neither Kesho nor any of his men uttered a word beyond this, that they reserved their defence for the High Court. In the taking of depositions many days passed. When the flying ship went to Torna it was the

end of January. Not until the end of March was the magistrates' inquiry concluded. Then all the accused were committed to the High Court, and the order was that the trial should be held on the fifteenth of May and following days.

Kesho, as I have written, possessed agreeable manners, and from the first he proceeded to ingratiate himself with all the officers in the great jail. This was his craftiness ; for by some means he intended to contrive to escape. He and his men obeyed every order, it might be said, before it was given. So the high officers were pleased, and the warders perceived that these prisoners were unlike all others. For it is known that for the most part prisoners in the jails like to pass their time in making complaints, and disputing every order. All the devices of a prison soon became known to Kesho ; and he saw that prisoners who could in any way satisfy the warders, and even the office clerks, obtained privileges, such as lighter tasks, the use of a little opium, or interchange of letters with friends outside the walls. Kesho was in no hurry to do anything that would excite suspicion. But one day when

he was coming back from the court in the prison van he found opportunity to speak some words to the warder who was in charge. And he told him that he should take leave and go to a certain man in the city and mention Kesho's name, and upon which he would receive fifty rupees. This sum would be a free gift to the warder ; and there was no condition but that when the time came he should show kindness. So this was done, and the man was greatly pleased ; and gradually Kesho made the same arrangement with other officers of the jail. But for any design of escape there was no haste.

At length the time for the trial in the High Court arrived, and Kesho and his men were stationed in the dock in front of the judge, and the accusations were read out. To find the prisoners guilty or not guilty there was empanelled a jury of nine men, of whom five were Sahibs, two Hindoos, and two Mussulmans. The judge was to instruct the jury in the law, and place before them the reasons in favour of conviction or acquittal, and if they gave a verdict of guilty to pass the sentence. For the

prosecution there were barristers and pleaders to conduct the case ; but for his part Kesho refused to have any but himself for his defence.

The accusations were many and various ; and in case any individual charge should fail there was this added, namely, that of belonging to a gang of dacoits, under Section 400 of the Indian Penal Code. In the cross-questioning of the witnesses and in the setting forth of his reply to the charges the cleverness and audacity of this lawless one were magnificent. He also called witnesses of his own to speak for him. How hard it is to prove to the satisfaction of a court that which is known to all the world is the common experience of us Police. On the one side, if we restrict ourselves to facts, the court will say that the witnesses are too few and the evidence insufficient ; and if in order to avoid this difficulty we add to the actual witnesses such persons as are ready to state that they saw what indeed happened, though they themselves were not present, these may fail to answer some foolish question of pleaders ; and so again the guilty man is set free, and the Police are punished.

True witnesses also become confused with much questioning, and give such answers that it may well be supposed that they have merely been tutored to rattle off certain statements like a parrot, having no real knowledge of the circumstances.

The trial lasted for many days and only some part may be recorded, lest in the writing of this history there be too many words. The first charge was the robbery of the Mysore gold from the train. There were many witnesses who spoke of the tampering with the distant signal, the arrival of the train without the guard's van, and the subsequent discovery of the van on the branch line in the forest, the injuries to the two constables, the death of Tookeram, and the disappearance of the treasure. And the judge and the jury and all the spectators were amazed at the audacity. But when it came to proof against Kesho, what was to be said? This conscienceless miscreant denied indignantly that he had had any connection with this business. "Because I have done great things which I shall disclose," said he, "is my name to be taken in vain for the sins of disgraceful people whom I

would willingly bring to justice? Have not I punished the oppressors of the poor? Were not these people in the treasure train innocent? Why should I lay hands upon them?" And when the guard De Souza and others swore that they had recognised Kesho he asked them such questions on this, that, and the other point that they became lost in confusion, and in their replies they contradicted themselves and one another. Then Kesho said, "Now will I tell this court something. It is seen that these men are liars, and that, not knowing who was their enemy, they have put the burden upon this humble one. The truth is this. On the morning after this ghurbhur I chanced to go on my business to the station of Bilgi to take a ticket; and I then learnt of the robbery of the treasure. Now will I produce witness to this." Then he called the ticket clerk and station-master of Bilgi. The clerk stated that he had sold a ticket to Kesho; and then of the station-master Kesho asked this question:

"Did I speak to you on the platform on the morning after the robbery?"

"Yes, I remember that you did," said the

station-master; for in truth Kesho's face was not one that might easily be forgotten.

"What did I say to you?" continued Kesho.

"You asked me how it was that there was a train at that time, as it was not thought that there would be one so soon," said the station-master.

"What reply did you give me?"

"I cannot say."

"I can remind you," said Kesho. "You gave me abominable abuses. Do you remember?" and Kesho fixed his piercing glance upon the witness.

"It may be so," he was forced to reply.

Then Kesho addressed the court on this charge. How, he asked, could a guilty man behave as it was proved that he had? Would the robber of the gold, instead of making his escape, return to the station and take a ticket, and hold conversation with the station-master? And for what manner of man he was had he not submitted quietly to abominable abuses? And in the end, such was the effect of his cleverness, that of this charge he was acquitted. But why there should be all this time and trouble in proving and

disproving that which is known by everyone is not understood by this humble one. What need was there to hold trial of such an one as Kesho? Should he not be at once hanged or shot when he were taken? Truly there is no comprehension of the Sahibs.

Next was the charge of the dacoity in the house of Devidass, the money-lender of Bagiwadi. The first witness was Devidass himself. And as he made his recital of the zoolum that he had suffered, and it was seen that this wretch was reduced from riches to poverty, and that his nose was cut off, much pity was felt for him. But after Kesho asked him questions, and he was forced to reply, the pity became less. And the questions and answers were on this wise:

"What you have told the court is perfectly true; but some things are wanting. Before I did justice on you was not a trial held by me?"

"A trial was held."

"Was there not a 'punch' who found you guilty?"

"There was."

"What were the charges against you?"

The witness made no reply.

"Very well, I will assist your memory. Was not this one charge, that to Govindram you had twenty years ago advanced three hundred rupees, and after receiving from him twelve hundred rupees you had so inveigled him in the meshes of your books of falsehood that he still appeared to owe you five hundred rupees? Was that charge not true?"

"This was true."

The words seemed to be torn from his unwilling lips. And in answer to many other questions the miserable man was forced to reply that for small advances he had extorted from his debtors payments of the amount ten and twenty times over, and then seized their lands and houses in satisfaction of his claims, and ruined cultivators and widows and orphans.

"What was the value of property taken from you in the dacoity?"

"Fifty thousand rupees in gold, silver, and ornaments."

"When you came to Bagiwadi how much money did you possess?"

"It may have been one hundred rupees."

"What is the value of your house that you have built in Bagiwadi?"

"It may be thirty thousand rupees."

"That is sufficient. I have no more questions."

Then Kesho addressed the court on this charge.

"For the affair of Bagiwadi I am charged as a criminal for dacoity. My reply is that it was not dacoity, but justice. This court has heard the iniquities which this oppressor of the poor has admitted. But he has been left free, while on my wrists are handcuffs and on my ankles fetters. What justice could his victims obtain from your courts? Have not the courts said that the debts were true debts, and the agreements in accordance with law? Have not the courts made decrees on the mortgages of ignorant ones for the losing of their lands to this snake? It is true that for the advancing of money to the poor that they may purchase seed for the sowing and stock for the grazing, there must be sowkars; it is right also that they should receive reasonable interest, both borrower and lender being benefited. But these ravages of extortion which your law protects

and encourages are the work of devils, not of men. You may have your law, but I, Kesho, have my law ; and by my law I have done justice. I have relieved the poor, and the poor are blessing me and my justice. I have punished oppressors, and other oppressors are taking warning and ceasing from oppression lest they too should undergo their fate. For this justice at Bagiwadi, and my other acts of justice, which you charge to me as dacoities, there is no need to call witnesses, because I admit them all, though not as dacoities but as justices ; and if I am at any time free I will not cease from doing justice and enforcing my law."

Such were the artful words of this rebel. And all who heard were amazed ; and it was understood that by his cleverness his life was saved.

Then was considered the affair of the Diksal treasury. This too Kesho admitted ; and he called as a witness the magistrate Trimbuk, and by his questionings he forced him to confess that from this, that, and the other he had taken bribes in order to pervert justice and make the right cause appear the wrong, and the wrong cause appear the right. And so for Trimbuk there was

felt disgust and contempt. As for the money, Kesho said, and this was true, that for the most part it had been given to the poor, and in the redressing of wrongs caused by Trimbuk.

Then Kesho requested to be allowed to call a witness to his character. And permission being granted he called upon Trench Sahib. Then there were these questions and answers:

"Sahib, you have for a long time sought to arrest me. You have followed me hither and thither on the mountains and on the plains?"

"I certainly have."

"If you had caught me when I was doing my justice at Bagiwadi or elsewhere, you would have shot me?"

"Certainly, if I could not have arrested you."

"It is not likely then that I should bear good will towards you?"

"Possibly not."

"Were you ever in my power?"

"Yes, on two occasions."

"On the first of these I held a gun, and you were defenceless. Did I shoot you?"

"No; you gave me back my gun."

"On the second occasion you were my prisoner in the cavern. How did I then behave?"

"You gave food to me and my companions."

"How did you get away from the cavern?"

"By a secret entrance from a well."

"Could I have blocked up that entrance?"

"You could."

"It will be seen from the statements of Trench Sahib," said Kesho, addressing the court, "that while this Sahib has sought my life because I did justice, he has twice been in my power, and I could have taken his life. But I did him kindness. Is it seen from this whether I am a revengeful man or not, whether I am a bloodthirsty, lawless rebel?"

And in the court there was a hum as of applause.

The last accusation was the affair of the piracy on the high seas. For the zoolum on the captain of the *Bella Flora*, Kesho insisted that he was but doing justice. Regarding the *Kandalika* he also represented that it was his duty to rescue his officers of justice who had been apprehended. And then he called the young officer of the *Albatross*, and there was this questioning and answering.

"Were you sorry when the *Albatross* was sent to arrest me?"

"No, I was very glad."

"Why?"

"Because we were to have some fun."

"Did you have fun? Was it a good tamasha?"

"It wasn't bad; it relieved our monotony, but it would have been better if there had been some fighting."

"Fighting is a good thing."

"Of course it is."

"I thank you, Sahib. I hope we may meet again."

"That is my hope," said the young officer.

"From this it may be seen," said Kesho, addressing the court, "that English Sahibs dislike monotony and like fighting. This Sahib and I are of one way of thinking. Under the British Raj is there not too much monotony and too little fighting? This is not good for my people."

After hearing witnesses the prosecutor summed up his case against the prisoners, and made a speech lasting two days, until everyone was wearied. Kesho then spoke in his defence; and his

eloquence, seeing that he was of no education, surprised all who listened. The judge then proceeded to charge the jury, summing up the evidence for the prosecution and defence, and laying down the law by which the jury were to be guided. He told them that it was their duty to decide what facts were true, and to return the verdict which under such view ought, according to his direction, to be returned. He warned them that they had nothing to do with the specious arguments of the accused that he was doing justice. They had only to consider whether the acts committed infringed the law. Then the jury retired to consider their verdict. They considered for two hours, and then the foreman informed the judge that they were not unanimous, but that all the Sahibs and the two Mahometans found the accused guilty of piracy, and for the other charges guilty of belonging to a gang of dacoits, the individual cases being merged in this. The Sahibs alone would have pressed the separate charges; but to this the Mahometans would not agree, and so to have their concurrence they yielded something. As for the two Hindoo

jurors, they found all the accused not guilty on each and every point. It is known that in London the jury must be unanimous, but the law in India is different. Here, if as many as six out of nine jurors are of one opinion, and the judge agrees with them, the judge is to give judgment in accordance with such opinion. And this too is to be said, that the seven men who found the accused guilty recommended them to some mercy.

Then the judge addressed the prisoners, and his long speech included these words :

" The charges against you have been considered with the utmost care, and you have been found guilty by the jury of piracy, which comes under the law relating to dacoities, and of belonging to a gang of persons associated for the purpose of habitually committing dacoity. It is fortunate for you that the charges of dacoity with murder have been dropped. The jury have moreover recommended you to mercy, as I take it because you, Kesho, appear to have had some notion that you were a redresser of grievances, some of which may even have been real. Had you been convicted of an offence punishable with death

this might have been taken into consideration. But this is not so, and as regards you, Kesho, the leader of this band of law-breakers, and you, Balaji, whose education should have warned you of the danger which you were running, it is clear to me that in the interests of the community it would be dangerous to allow you any chance of again preying on the people of this land. You are hereby sentenced to transportation for life. For the remaining accused the sentence is ten years' rigorous imprisonment each."

Then Kesho and all the prisoners made salaam, and they were removed. So ended this great trial, of which I have written down only a short part. And all those sentenced to imprisonment were shortly drafted to various prisons to serve their sentences, and so they were scattered. Kesho and Balaji alone remained in the great jail at Bombay. They were to cross the Kala pani (black water) to the convict settlement at the Andaman islands. But it was now the end of May, and the monsoon had burst, and no steamer would go to the islands for five months. Meanwhile, until the time for removal had come, Kesho

and Balaji were set to hard labour, in the manner of prisoners sentenced to rigorous imprisonment. At first each of them was employed in the weaving of carpets. In this work they had no experience, but possessing much intelligence they quickly became adepts, and were ready to turn out twice as much work in one day as any other prisoners. Kesho even devised a new pattern for the carpets; and instead of the red and white squares and stripes, carpets were woven with a design in which was a mountain fortress and a royal crown. And these two being very obedient and willing, many officers also having received money from Kesho, favours were shown them; and if sometimes the two conversed in private no one was going to interfere. All the procedure of the jail became quickly known to Kesho, and in accordance therewith he made his plans.

In the first place he submitted a petition against his sentence to the Governor-General under Section 401 of the Criminal Procedure Code, and he caused the petition to be written by Balaji in this wise:

"To the exalted in rank, the illustrious in

station, the kind to his friends, the just of the world, the refuge of the poor, His Excellency the Governor-General in Council,—salutation and the peace of the Almighty. Praise be to God and thanks one thousand that this humble one, who desires peace and goodwill, has hitherto enjoyed protection under the condescension of the pillar of the universe. Until now this suppliant's face has shone with the brilliancy of truth, and it will not now be blackened by the calumnies of evil speakers and slanderers. This slave has been engaged in works of benevolence and justice; but his sincerity is now doubted. It is the lot of many virtuous in life to be misunderstood, and this suppliant cannot avoid his fate. This is the request of this slave and well-wisher, that the papers of his case may be perused by the light of the world, and his defence considered by the fountain of wisdom; further, that permission be accorded him to plead in person the cause of innocence at the feet of the exalted one. This afflicted one also pleads for justice to his fellow sufferer, Balaji."

"Shahbash," said Kesho, when this was read

out to him. "Of a truth this is well written. There will come an answer to this." And he requested the officers day by day whether there was a reply to his petition.

Meanwhile, what he learnt of the jail procedure was this: that for the most part prisoners were released when their sentence had expired, but from time to time orders of the Sirkar were received by the post for the release of certain prisoners at any period of their sentence. And thus the prince of villains made his plan. Having ingratiated himself with the clerks of the office, he understood that on occasions when their work of correspondence and the writing up of registers was heavy it was the custom to appoint from among the convicts one or two of good education and proper behaviour to assist them. Kesho himself, having no letters, could not be employed thus, but Balaji, since he was educated in English, was qualified. The next thing that the faithless one did was to arrange with the clerks that several of them should apply for leave at one and the same time on urgent private affairs. In the end the chief officer of the jail, finding that Balaji

was capable of doing work in the office, gave leave to two clerks ; and Balaji was relieved of carpet-making and set to work at correspondence. And from time to time he had consultations with Kesho.

Now it will be perceived without my writing it what Kesho had in his mind. There was a machine in the office known as a typewriter, which if one played on certain keys as though it were an instrument of music gave forth a sound of click-click, and behold, there came forth a letter as plain as though it were printed in the chapkhana. All the letters and orders that came from the Sirkar were typed in this way ; and there was no longer any confusion from illegible handwriting. Letters too going from the jail were of this fashion. In the working of the machine Balaji soon became proficient.

In the monsoon, or the season of rains, the gum by which the letters were closed became less tenacious, and the envelopes after some experience could be opened with the aid of a knife in such a way that if they were again closed no one could observe that they had been in any way tampered with. And Balaji, going to the office before the

other clerks, made himself acquainted with this arrangement. Among other things it is to be remembered that every letter and communication going from one office to another bears its own serial number, the number with the subject matter of the document being entered in registers for permanent record. Moreover, the number of a letter contained in any particular envelope was written outside that envelope; and if an envelope contained several communications the number of each would be written outside—for example, 3078, 3079, 3080, together with the designation of office of despatch. This with other details was noted, as also the terms and phrases in which orders were couched. It may be said too that when one had read ten of these orders he had read a thousand, so identical was the wording.

Who can believe the incredible astuteness and cleverness of this pair of rogues? Though Kesho could not read or write yet he understood the whole arrangement; and under his direction Balaji was the jackal to this lion. Finally Balaji wrote out this order in English, leaving the number and the date blank. The signature,

which was the same on all letters from the judicial department, he easily arranged, by holding his order up to a window over one of the real signatures and then tracing it.

Petition from
Kesho son of Gopal
and
Balaji son of Govind.

No. 8596.

Home Department.

Simla, 16th August, 190—

Resolution.

His Excellency the Governor-General in Council is pleased to direct that the unexpired portion of the sentences on Kesho son of Gopal and Balaji son of Govind shall be remitted.

F. H. Robinson,
Secretary to the
Government of India.

To the Government
of Bombay.

No. 7380.

Judicial Department.

Bombay Castle, 22nd August, 190—

Resolution.

Copy of the Resolution of the Government of India is forwarded for compliance,

L. H. Brown,
Acting Under-Secretary
to Government.

To the Chief Officer,
Bombay Jail.

Having completed this, and explained it in our language to Kesho, he made this device. Keeping it ready he looked each day in the office for the receipt of a letter from the Sirkar. And on the fifth day there was a thick envelope bearing outside the following numbers : Judicial Department, 7378, 7379, 7380, 7381. Slowly and cautiously he opened the cover, and he saw that the date of each letter was August 22nd. Then he took out the letter which bore the number 7380, and concealed it ; and he wrote that same number 7380, and the date, August 22nd, on the order of release that he had composed, and placed this in the packet.

And he reclosed the envelope, and placed it with the pile of other letters on the office table ; and he was busied in making entries in the registers, as though no thought of deception had ever entered his mind.

At ten o'clock came the other clerks and the head clerk, a Portuguese named De Silva. He, sitting at the table, began to open the letters, handing over each one in turn to one of the clerks for entry in the inward register. And when he opened the thick packet from the Judicial Department, he glanced at number 7378, and number 7379, which concerned mere matters of routine, and passed them on to the inward register clerk, and next he perused number 7380. Then he took off his spectacles, wiped them, and put them on again, and once more read the order.

Then, being in such great astonishment that he forgot the custom of inward register, he ran off with the document to the chief officer of the jail. And he too was amazed ; and both went to the office, and scrutinised the envelope and the numbers that were outside the envelope and on the letters ; and everything was found to be correct.

So the chief officer went to where Kesho was working at the carpets, and informed him that the Governor-General had ordered his release.

"This slave was confident that the exalted in station would do justice to his faithful servant," said Kesho. "The blessings of the Almighty may ever surround the refuge of the afflicted."

And so Kesho and Balaji gave up their prisoner's dress, and put on their plain clothes, and walked out quietly into the street.

So much has this humble one had to record. Truly the burden has been heavy. And whereas this Shaitan, Kesho Naik, has through his cleverness recovered his freedom, God knows what more there may not be to write.

The signature of Krishna, son of Balaram.

THE END

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